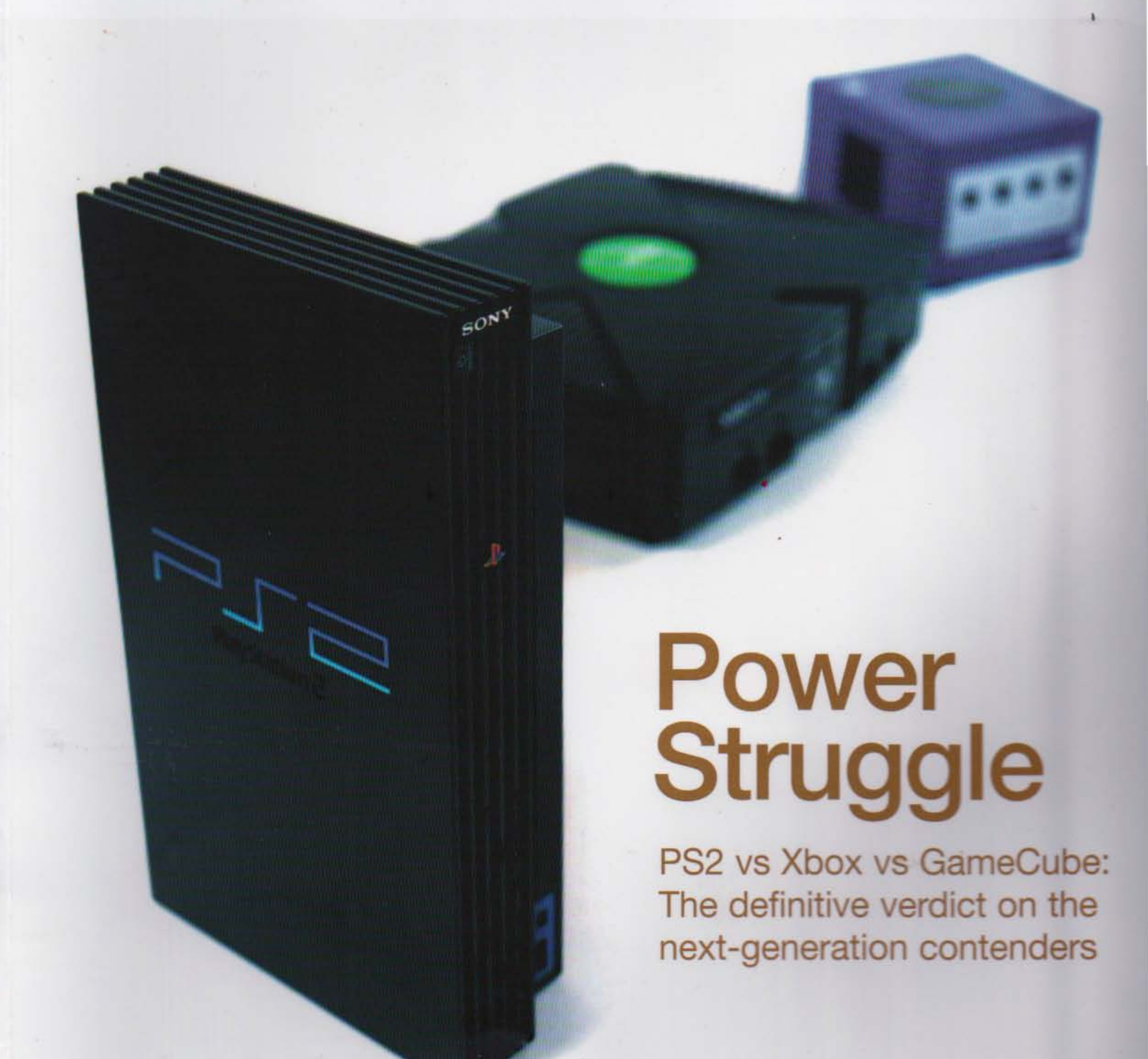
The **future** of **electronic entertainment** issue#106

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Xbox and GameCub
take America by stor
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Spider-Man: The Movi
Eve Online, Auto Mod
Inside Big Blue Box
Reviewed: Rogue Lea
Dead Or Alive 3, Metal
Gear Solid 2, Dropship

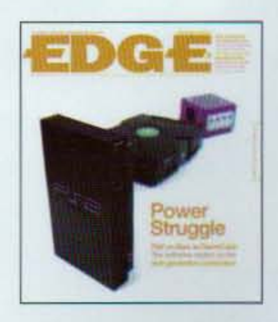


Power Struggle

PS2 vs Xbox vs GameCube: The definitive verdict on the next-generation contenders







We already know **Edge** readers are going to own at least two of the next-gen consoles (and probably all three), but for the sake of argument, let's assume you've only got the budget for one. Which one do you choose?

Despite PlayStation2's convoluted architecture, it's clearly a capable machine, and features a handful of real must-have titles. But it's still a brave gamer that wanders into EB without having read reviews to pluck a game at random from the bloated shelves. For every *Burnout* or *Ico* or *Rez*, there's a *Stunt GP* or *The Bouncer* or one of any number of *Army Men* games. And perhaps worse than the few truly awful releases that lie in wait for the uninitiated, is the wealth of middling titles, the fives and sixes that exist merely so that Sony can boast a portfolio of over 200 titles.

Okay, so Xbox then? It's big and it's fast and it's got *Halo* and, well, some other stuff. But it's the best part of three PS2 games more expensive, and what about the up-and-coming games? There are a few of note: *Jet Set Radio Future*, *GunValkyrie*, *Soul Calibur 2*... but there's a far greater list of unknowns, titles that have no resonance among the cognoscenti. And Xbox's US heritage has spawned an alarming number of native sports titles of little or no interest to UK gamers. Xbox has impressed, but it's still the dark stranger about whom we know too little, and whose ultimate motives are possibly sinister.

And thence to GameCube. So far, it's both overjoyed and underwhelmed in equal measure, but it carries the beloved Nintendo brand and hopes are high. Even though Nintendo treats UK gamers like an evil stepmother – denying us favours, and belatedly doling out hand-me-downs – we still have the capacity to forgive. Anyone who struggled through the last five years an N64 gamer will know the score, and it looks like we're going to have to do it all again. (Eventually.)

So, for the time being, it's a tough call. To fully enjoy all aspects of the videogaming canon, you have to get, or at least have access to, all three systems. Thanks to the freedom of a competitive marketplace, if you want to play *GT3* and *Halo* and *Pikmin*, you've no other option.

Back in issue 8 of **Edge**, our editorial optimistically predicted the coming of a standard, a VHS for games. We were right about consoles becoming increasingly similar in specification, and right about MPEG playback as standard, and network access as standard. But we were wrong about that single format.

Dead wrong...



Features









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the next generation


030


032


033


037

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"This is a high-class bureau de change, not some two-bit nipple peep show in Rio de Janeiro"


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frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Photography: Martin Thompson

All systems go

Microsoft and Nintendo both lay claim to the spoils of a genuinely successful dual launch period

As **Edge** goes to press, the dust has yet to fully settle on the US launches of Xbox and GameCube, which took place amid customary scenes of celebrity endorsement, competitions and queues, on November 15 and 18 respectively. In the weeks following the launch of the two consoles, a wide and sometimes contradictory range of sales figures have been released by a number of parties, with each manufacturer claiming a greater degree of retail success. Though it's still too early, and probably disingenuous, to determine which of the two came out on top, it's clear that, compared to the logistical glitches that beset last year's PlayStation2 launch, both Nintendo and Microsoft have reason to be cheerful.

Three days later, Nintendo opted for a less ostentatious approach. Buoyed by a barrage of reports in the mainstream press that came out in favour of the cheaper GameCube, the company held one of its regular Cube Club events in the lower Manhattan district of New York, attended by celebrities such as Lil' Kim, John Turturro, Matthew Modine, and a three-storey projection of Mario. Nevertheless, despite the general absence of country-wide launch parties, gamers still turned up as far as 14 hours in advance to pick up one of the first black or indigo GameCube units from their local K-Mart of Toys R Us – despite the unpleasantly cold weather.

Retailers were quick to come out in support of a launch period that confounded

Compared to the logistical glitches that beset last year's PlayStation2 launch, both Nintendo and Microsoft have reason to be cheerful

Though preorder schemes were heavily subscribed, there turned out to be enough units on shelves for anyone that braved opening night queues to pick up their console of choice – at least on the first morning of each launch. Which isn't to say that the respective opening nights were bereft of hype. Microsoft's launch kicked off with a huge event staged in front of the Times Square Toys R Us, attended by Bill Gates himself. Times Square was bedecked in Xbox green, with green doughnuts, glow necklaces and even hot dog vendors providing a suitably garish backdrop to a quick game of *Dead Or Alive 3* between Gates and wrestling superstar The Rock. When midnight arrived, one lucky punter, at the start of the queue received a signed Xbox from the Microsoft chairman himself.

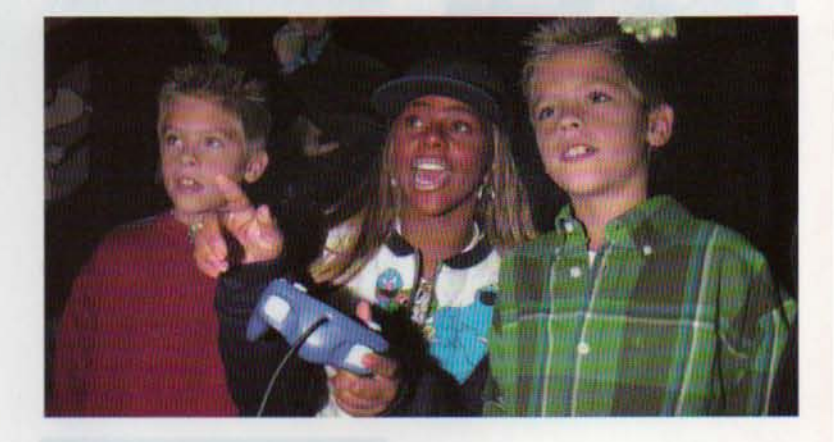
Other midnight Xbox launches took place around the country, but they didn't come close to matching the size and scope of New York's monster gala. In San Francisco, for example, retail outlet EBX hosted its own high-spirited party with free pizza and Mountain Dew, tunes provided by a local radio station, plus a raffle giveaway for Xbox games and a snowboard. Surprisingly, the queue (of over 100 people) didn't actually form that far in advance, with the first person arriving at around 6pm.

pessimistic observations of declining consumer confidence, with Microsoft in particular wheeling out supporting statements from major retailers. "The Xbox launch was the best launch I have ever been a part of, and that goes all the way back to launches like that of Nintendo Entertainment System, Super NES, 3DO and Atari," reported **Dan DeMatteo**, president of Gamestop, and echoed by Wayne Yodzio of Toys R Us. Meanwhile, Electronics Boutique's vice president of merchandising, **Peter Roithmayr**, pointed to broken sales records. "It was incredible. We had the single largest sales day in Electronics Boutique history. This was a record we thought would take forever to be broken."

Gushing endorsements from vested interests aside, it was impossible to dispute the fact that both major system launches avoided nearly all the pitfalls of Sony's colossally over-promised, under-delivered PS2 release last year. With no convoluted preorder scheme or manufacturing shortfalls, and no doubt owing to the fact that two consoles were on the market at the same time, availability continued to meet demand thanks to successive shipments from the two console manufacturers. One of the upshots of this was that Internet auction











Despite gloomy predictions that declining consumer confidence would negatively affect the launches of Xbox and GameCube, US gamers turned out in force to pick up early shipments of hardware, with titles like *Luigi's Mansion* and *Halo* also quickly snapped up















Though both Microsoft and Nintendo quoted impressive sales statistics, it remains to be seen whether these will dent Sony's PlayStation2 dominance

speculators got their fingers burned – perhaps the only audience sector to be significantly disappointed. Several bitter parties went on record to register their disapproval that the massive markups of up to $300 that accompanied the PlayStation2 launch weren't repeated this year.

Anybody looking for frenzied speculation only had to wait a couple of weeks though, thanks to successive announcements detailing sales figures, shipping allotments and software ratios. The tortuous, tit-for-tat process of determining precisely how successful the two companies had been was kicked off by initial reports from investment bank Goldman Sachs. During the week following November 18, it reported, more stores had sold out of their initial shipments of Xbox than those that had sold out of GameCubes. Of course these figures were after Microsoft's three-day lead, but Nintendo quickly came out to declare the GameCube the fastest selling console launch ever after it shipped 740,000 units. Claiming to have sold 600,000 of those units in North America during the launch period, it also declared a sell-through rate of nearly twice that of Xbox, with *Luigi's Mansion* "the most popular console launch game ever" apparently.

Nintendo also declared a sell-through rate of nearly twice that of Xbox, with Luigi's Mansion "the most popular console launch game ever"

Still, it wasn't long before yet another report, this time by Credit Suisse First Boston, also an investment bank, offered another interpretation, pointing to GameCube sales figures of 469,000 units during its first week on sale. Xbox sales, by comparison, were of 186,000 units during the same week, bringing it to a total of 556,000 units after its launch. In terms of the all-important software ratio, this report held promising news for Xbox, which at 2.4 games per console was ahead of GameCube and PlayStation, which each had a ratio of 1.9. But then came Microsoft's announcement that it too had had the most successful launch of all time, or more specifically, the "best-selling videogame console launch on record after two weeks of sales", and that *Halo* had outsold *Luigi's Mansion* over the same period. Though **Edge** eagerly awaits finding out what the best-selling console was after five-and-three-quarter days following a full moon, it sadly seems that the



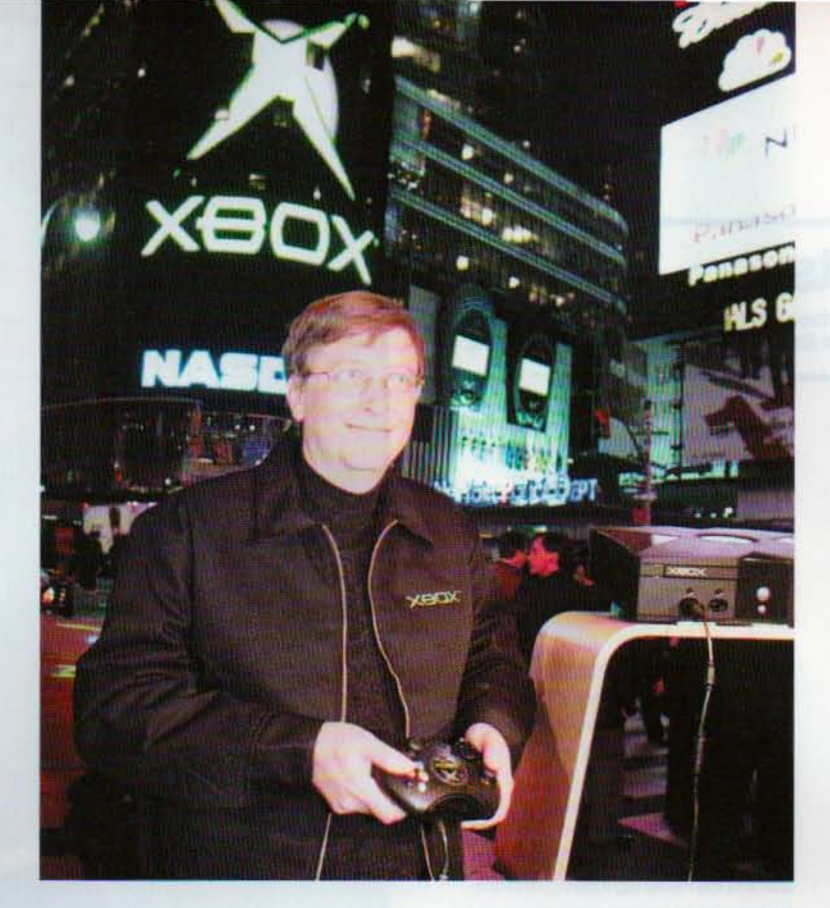




***Luigi's Mansion* was, according to Nintendo, the fastest ever selling launch title, with *Rogue Leader* also doing brisk business. The hotly anticipated *Smash Brothers DX*, meanwhile, gave Japanese sales of GameCube a timely boost, compensating for the disappointing launch**







true scale of Xbox and GameCube penetration will have to wait until more concrete sales figures are established. By which time it will also be apparent whether Microsoft's target of 1 million to 1.5 million units shipped, and Nintendo's target of 1.3 million units sold, by Christmas, will have been met.

As this posturing suggests, a successful US launch is imperative. Nintendo is clearly hoping to maintain its untarnished 15-year record of profitability, and in light of the muted Japanese launch and the fact that the company derived half of its revenues in the six months to September in the US, it's a crucial territory – certainly more so than Europe, which presents localisation and logistical hurdles. Indeed Nintendo's European PR agency still has no idea when the company will break its silence regarding the European hardware launch, and publishers are still citing, off the record, a September release date.

For Microsoft, the region may acquire a greater significance in light of **Steve Ballmer**'s disclosure that the company does indeed have broader aims for its console than just the games market. "We know we have to succeed but there is a broader concept there that we will pursue at some point," he revealed two weeks after the launch, to the surprise of nobody.

"You can say, is it the end of the road or is there a bigger play? And the answer is yeah, there's a bigger play we hope to get over time." Nevertheless, Microsoft is going to have to achieve that bigger play without the low cost base, high thirdparty licensing fees, and strong firstparty IP that Nintendo can count on.

Whether either company will ever be able to topple the hugely successful incumbent, PlayStation2, is another matter. But they both seem to have got off to a very positive start.



Some onlookers might have been unhappy that The Rock's drubbing of Bill Gates didn't take place in the ring, but the Microsoft chairman was in buoyant mood







Microsoft also claimed some sort of best-selling status for its major launch title, *Halo: Combat Evolved*, while both *Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding*, and Tecmo's *Dead Or Alive 3* also proved popular. But the company will have to wait to see how the console fares in Japan

Gates talks Xbox

While the Xbox launch celebrations were in full swing, **Edge** spoke with Microsoft supremo Bill Gates, to discuss what the future holds for Microsoft's home entertainment hub.

Five years ago, you argued that Microsoft's gaming focus would be on PC. Since then, quite a bit has changed and you're entering the market with a console. Where do you see Microsoft's gaming focus in the next five years?
For the hardcore gamers who want to play games on their TV set, the Xbox is where it's at. The PC is really different – that's one thing I've learned during this whole Xbox process. The types of games are different, the way people think about development is different. We can continue to make great improvements on the PC side and we can make the Xbox have better games, and we can make those work together.

Do you see Windows and Xbox converging in the near future?
Well, there's certainly common technology that benefits the two, but they're optimised for very different experiences. So I would say, in terms of convergence, that there's some neat things we can do to make sure they work well together – that all makes sense. But first and foremost you've got to get people to understand [that Xbox is] the best game platform ever, and go out there and get critical mass, and then you can add a lot of neat things on to that.

Do you see online gaming becoming a major part of the console business in Xbox's lifetime?
Yeah, we absolutely think that online gaming will be a major thing so we're going to learn as we go. We spent a lot of time with the Xbox – we spent a lot of time with the developers and got their feedback and designed around that. We made our bet on broadband gaming. We built an Ethernet adaptor into every Xbox and we put a hard disk into every Xbox, so it's a very different approach than anybody's taken before. We decided that, hey, if you want to play online games you're going to want to talk to your friends while you play. We can deliver that because of the assumptions we've made.



Thumb Bandits

Videogame television has had a chequered past, but the latest Channel 4 effort attempts to pitch the form to a broader audience







'Thumb Bandits' attempts to mix serious features with lighthearted reviews and previews. On present evidence the format needs some tweaking, but at least presenters, Alex Krotoski and Iain Lee, know their games. Although it will never please everyone, the show is improving

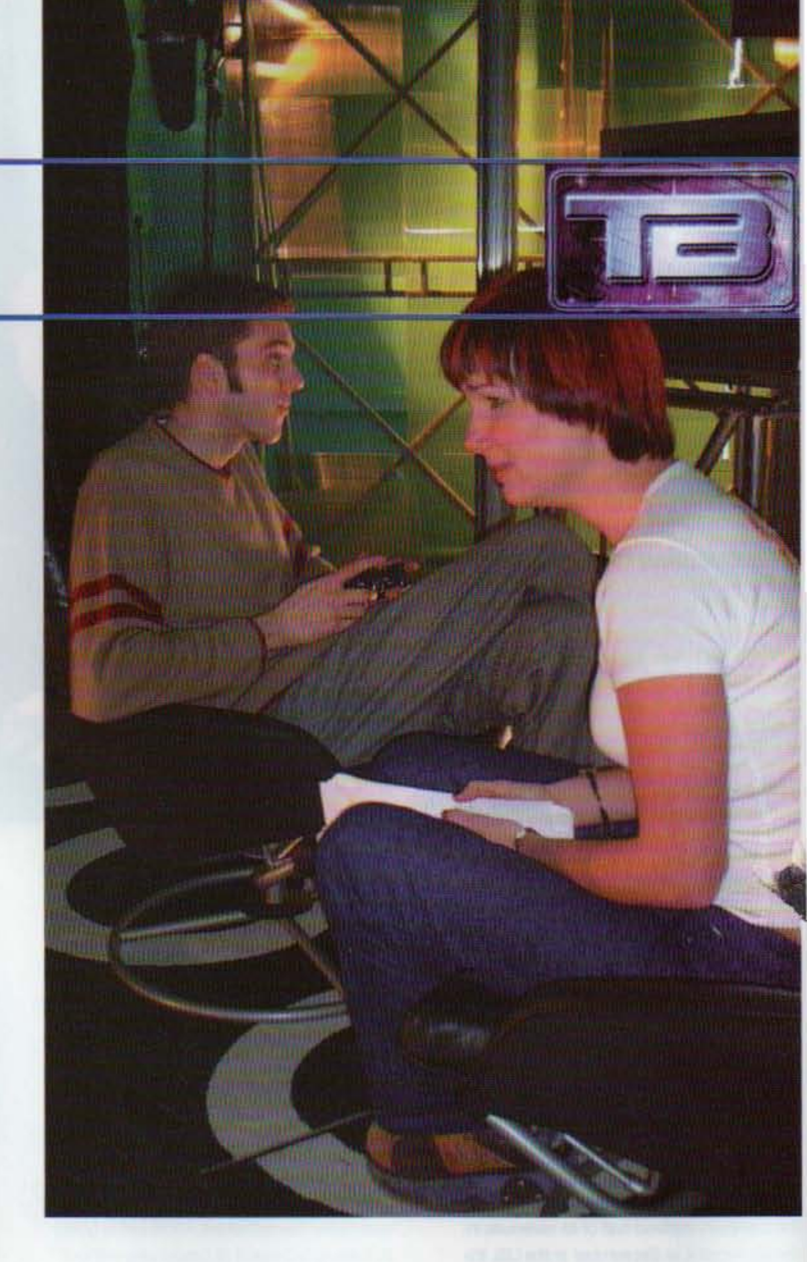
Videogames and television have traditionally gone together like caviar and custard. 'GamesMaster', 'Bad Influence', 'T.I.G.S', 'Bits': all have sought to render an interactive entertainment interesting via a passive medium while maintaining high viewing figures and satisfying the 'hardcore' element. Arguably, none have succeeded.

To remedy the situation Channel 4 has commissioned a new videogame show with the simple remit: do it better. First broadcast on November 16th at 11.50pm, 'Thumb Bandits' is attempting to combine reviews, news, interviews, features and more 'out there' subject matter into a 28-minute show.

Scheduled to capture the attention spans of the Friday night post-pub posse the programme makers clearly have a tough task keeping both enthusiasts and mainstream viewers happy. In truth, the show got off to a stuttering start with the first two episodes altering in tone and structure and containing the occasional factual error. (A situation not helped by the five-week delay between shooting and broadcast.)

However, Ideal World Productions, the production company behind the show, is keen to emphasise the improvements which have been made since the programme first aired. "Response has been really good," defends **Tim Brocklehurst**, the assistant producer of 'Thumb Bandits'. "There have been a few disgruntled 'Bits' and 'GamesMaster' fans, but we have only aired two programmes. We actually have eight in the can and the programme has come on leaps and bounds – but our audience don't know that yet."

Certainly the third programme, broadcast on November 30th at 11.30pm, was much better with stronger content and a more defined structure. Although things are looking more promising for the next 12 episodes it would seem that the philosophy underpinning the programme strays little from the well-worn paths of TV know-how. "We are trying to open out the world of videogaming to a much larger audience,"



continues Brocklehurst, "so any chance we get to cover sex, drugs, violence and rock 'n' roll we jump at – these subjects being the cornerstone to weekend television."

'Thumb Bandits' is currently drawing in around 800,000 viewers (which compares favourably with 'Bits') and its presenters, **Iain Lee** ('The 11 o'clock Show') and **Aleks Krotoski** ('Bits'), are genuine gaming enthusiasts. Both are keen to emphasise their passion for the form and point out the difficulties of reaching two disparate audience strands. "Some viewers are boffins," says Lee. "People just say, 'That's the lanky git off the telly making fun of my hobby'. But I am a boffin, I am a geek. I'm quite happy to take the piss out of myself." It is pleasing to note the acerbic humour which Lee has brought to the show.

While it may still be rough around the edges the programme's commitment to an older (though slightly inebriated) audience is commendable. "The journalism is more grown up and there's a different dynamic," concludes Krotoski. "We are really trying to include good features. It's far less wacky than 'Bits'." So, while videogame television is unlikely to make a radical departure from its past, early evidence suggests that 'Thumb Bandits' represents a step in the right direction. **Edge** will certainly stay tuned to see how the programme evolves over the coming months.

"Any chance we get to cover sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll we jump at – these subjects being the cornerstone to most viewer's weekend television"



The regional accents are a result of the show being shot in and around Glasgow

Digital Media World

Dedicated games conference bears witness to the continued creative complexity of the videogame industry

The videogame industry was well represented at this year's Digital Media World exhibition, which took place at London's Olympia (November 13–15). Companies such as Softimage and Discreet demonstrated their wares to a captive audience on the main showfloor, but for the first time, the event included a games conference, which took place over the first two days of the expo. Featuring a range of speakers, subjects covered included everything from interactive storytelling to the creative potential of wireless gaming.

The only real gripe that can be levelled at the event was the poor attendance, which owed a lot to a location which was difficult to find (even David Braben was initially turned away by overzealous doormen). When the conference got going though, there was much to commend it. Though there was a surprising amount of material that had been recycled by speakers from GDCE, there were several highlights.

Jason Kingsley of Rebellion and Andrew McKlennan of Steel Monkeys led a discussion about Strategies for Independent Developers, in which they outlined TIGA's attempts to come up with an alternate funding structure to compensate for publisher conservatism. Revolution Software's Charles Cecil spoke eloquently about crossplatform episodic content development. And Chris Bateman, of International Hobo, delivered an excellent talk about interactive storytelling which was unfortunately curtailed due to time constraints.

Warren Spector, delivering his talk via a live satellite link-up, was undoubtedly the most articulate and entertaining speaker, delivering an organic lecture that ranged widely, and exhorted the development community to provide players with the freedom that they deserve. But the real highlight of the Digital Media World games conference, was the diversity of the opinions that were on offer.

For example, while Ernest Adams was urging developers to take control of in-game narrative, Spector was urging them to allow players to create their own narrative. Jonathan Small and Charles Cecil both discussed multiformat development in an era of growing digital distribution, and they were each able to draw their own distinct conclusions. And wireless gaming platforms were as important to some speakers as next-generation consoles were to others. Surely this kind of discourse can only be a good thing?

Warren Spector was the most articulate and entertaining speaker, delivering a lecture that exhorted the development community to provide players with the freedom they deserve





Photography: Apollo Photographers Ltd





While the showfloor allowed show-goers to evaluate a wide range of animation packages, it was also possible to take in a wide variety of opinions about the future of videogames

CUTTINGS

Yamauchi announces incubation fund

Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi recently announced plans to set up an incubator fund to support fledgling developers. Using proceeds from the sale of a portion of his stake in the company, a 20 billion yen (£110m) investment fund will be set up in January. While the move will allow the Nintendo supremo to avoid capital gains tax, it is also a clear response to increased competition for developers following the entrance of Microsoft into the market, and follows the company's reduction of its thirdparty licensing fees. It also follows the recent releases of *Pikmin* and *Smash Brothers DX*, which have boosted sales of the GameCube in Japan, following a relatively muted launch.

Sony drops price of PS2 in Japan

Sony has finally officially announced a price cut for PlayStation2 in Japan, to ¥29,800 (£165). The company has also announced plans to officially launch PlayStation2 in South Korea. Previously unavailable in the region owing to a cultural import ban between the two countries, and high rates of piracy, the move is in response to Microsoft's decision to launch Xbox in the territory.

In related news, Hisashi Suzuki has announced that he is to resign as president and CEO of Square following the disappointing performance of the 'Spirits Within' movie, and Sony's acquisition of an 18.6 per cent stake. COO Yoichi Wada will replace him.

Dreamcast owners to choose ISP

European Dreamcast owners can finally officially choose to access the Internet through the ISP of their choice, following Sega Europe's decision to stop acting as exclusive provider of Dreamcast internet access services. The release of new browser software to replace Dreamkey versions 1.0, 1.5, and 2.0, will allow Dreamcast owners to use any available ISP throughout European territories. Online gaming will continue to be supported over the new browser, while Dreamarena portal services are to be merged with Sega Europe's Web site available at www.sega-europe.com. The company was keen to emphasise that its partnership with BT will continue.

BTopenworld unveils new gaming service

Focused content strategy kicks off with premium games service, as PlayStation2 access trials unveiled



BTopenworld's head of games, Geraint Bungay, highlights ease of use as one of the strengths of the company's offering

Recently Reviewed

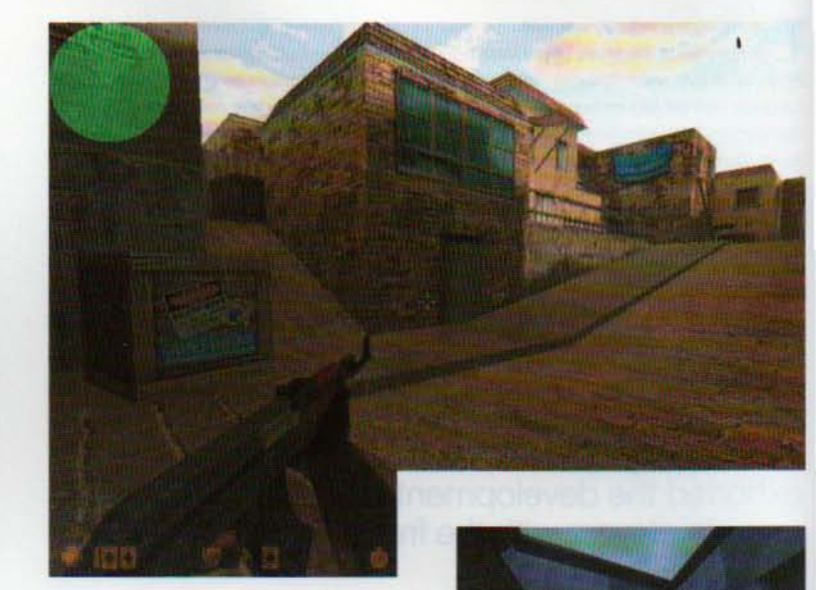


Unfortunately, due to a production error, last issue's review of *GTA III* was accompanied by an incorrect score. The correct Edge rating was eight out of ten.

In a bid to move from its current general portal offering towards an emphasis on significant content sectors, internet service provider BTopenworld has announced a paid-for games service. Building on the recent acquisition of key assets from Games Domain, the company has unveiled a subscription service operating at www.gamesdomain.co.uk for a fee of £9.99 per month. Although the service is available over both narrowband and broadband connections, and open to non-BTopenworld subscribers, the fact that it's being launched concurrently with a similar premium rate music service, would appear to indicate a bid to drive broadband uptake – despite protestations from BT to the contrary.

Given the preponderance of readily available freeplay sites, BTopenworld hopes that several strategic partnerships will deliver the sort of compelling content and service that can persuade gamers to part with their cash. "Advertising and e-commerce won't sustain these business models any more," argues the company's head of games, **Geraint Bungay**, explaining the move to a subscription service. "It's the only way that we can offer a professional quality service and guarantee being around next year. We'll be able to offer exclusive windows – so a game may come out but for the first week or first month you can only play it on Games Domain. And we'll have exclusive mods or maps. We're going to launch two maps in the next few weeks developed by the guys who did *Quake 3 Team Fortress*. We've paid those guys to develop a brand new map for us that will only be available on the Games Domain service. Then there's customer support from Alien Pants, which will be running leagues and competitions, and encourage the community to build. And because it's a paid-for service, you know that that community is going to last." Other strategic partnerships include Electronics Boutique, which will provide backend infrastructure, and Exent technologies, which has recently trialled games on demand over broadband connections.

Apart from supporting online gaming via the PC, BTopenworld will also conduct technical trials to facilitate network connectivity with PlayStation2. "We're kicking off the technical trials in the next few weeks, which will run for several weeks," explains Bungay. "But when the PS2 goes online you'll be able to access it via narrowband or broadband." Whereas cable operator Telewest seems to be aiming for a more content provision strategy with regard to the PlayStation2, as reported in E99, BTopenworld's deal is purely about access. "So if it's narrowband, you plug it into your standard phone line, and if it's broadband you use the network adaptor that Sony are going to ship at some point next year."



The new premium rate service was demonstrated at the BT Tower, with multiplayer *Quake* and *Castle Wolfenstein*





Eventually, the service will grow beyond the obvious target audience of hardcore gamers, to encompass the mainstream

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Halo: Combat Evolved	Xbox	Microsoft	Bungie	10
Rez	PS2/DC	SCEE/Sega	United Game Artists	9
Civilization III	PC	Infogrames	Firaxis	9
Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding	Xbox	Microsoft	In-house	8
Jak And Daxter	PS2	SCEA	Naughty Dog	8
Project Gotham Racing	Xbox	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	8
Shenmue II	DC	Sega	Sega-AM2	8
Virtua Tennis 2	DC	Sega	Hitmaker	8
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	PS2	Interplay	Black Isle Studios	8
Grand Theft Auto III	PS2	Take 2 Interactive	Rockstar/DMA	8
Minna De Puyo Puyo	GBA	Sega	Sonic Team	8
Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee	Xbox	Microsoft	Oddworld Inhabitants	7
Pikmin	GC	Nintendo	In-house	7
World Rally Champ'ship	PS2	SCEE	Evolution Studios	7
Bravo Music	PS2	SCEI	In-house	7
Half-Life	PS2	Vivendi Universal	Gearbox	7
Doom	GBA	Activision	id Software/David A. Palmer	6
Soul Reaver 2	PS2	Eidos Interactive	Crystal Dynamics	6
Fuzion Frenzy	Xbox	Microsoft	Blitz Games	3

Milia unveils Think Tank keynotes

Forrester Research looks at the mainstream in its keynote speech in Cannes next February

Reed Midem and Forrester research have announced details of the Think.Tank Summit 2002, that will accompany Milia 2002, The World's Interactive Content Marketplace. For the second successive year, the conference will take place over the first two days of the overall exhibition, which runs from February 4-8 at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes, and is dedicated to developers of content across broadband, interactive TV and videogames.

Emily Nagle Green, the Managing Director, North America, of Forrester Research, will be delivering an address which looks at the adoption of new technology by mainstream consumers. 'When Mainstream Consumers Go Interactive' looks at effect this audience sector will have on content delivery platforms, and outline the company's latest forecasts. "We are extremely happy to welcome back Forrester as a Research Advisor for our conferences at Milia 2002," declared the exhibition's executive director, **Laurine Garaude**. "Naturally we continue to develop the conference to ensure we build on its reputation for quality debate, high level discussion and keynote addresses from some of the industry's most important visionaries and business leaders."

Once again, those attending Milia will also be able to check out the Game Developer Village, and the winners of the eighth annual New Talent competition. Now that the deadline has passed for independent developers to register for the Game Developer Village, a committee composed of event sponsors and media partners is currently in the process of selecting the 30 successful applicants. Meanwhile, the 15 winners of the New Talent Competition will also be judged, before successful applicants are granted the opportunity to showcase their work in a dedicated area at the exhibition.







Taking place next February, Milia should allow representatives of the European games industry to reflect on what is promising to be a very successful Christmas retail period

CUTTINGS



Edge's sister magazine closes

Sadly, **Edge**'s US sister magazine, 'Next Generation', will be closing after releasing its final issue in January 2002, marking an end of an era. Launched in the US in January 1995, 'NextGen' was intended to emulate the success of **Edge**, reaching its peak in 1996 with an attendant website that became the industry standard in the US. During its run, it won praise from a wide range of quarters, including 'Time' magazine, 'USA Today', 'The Wall Street Journal', ABC News and 'Fortune'. Despite several redesigns and support from publisher Imagine, the magazine ultimately proved to be "a magazine of its time," according to Imagine president, Jonathan Simpson-Bint. **Edge** wishes the team the best of luck in its future endeavours. Concerned **Edge** readers should note that **Edge** is a separate entity and is unaffected by the closure.

But is it Art?

London's Institute of Contemporary Arts will be holding a conference on January 17 entitled 'Games And The Body', to explore the relationship between videogames and the human body. The event kicks off with a panel discussion at 5pm, and features the likes of **Edge** columnist Steven Poole, Nike's Ray Riley and neuroscientist Daniel Glaser. The event will be sponsored by PlayStation.

BioWare and Interplay fall out

BioWare has terminated its agreement with publisher Interplay, regarding the company's forthcoming D&D RPG, *Neverwinter Nights*. The move follows a lawsuit filed by the *Baldur's Gate* developer against Interplay over a breach of contract. BioWare has stated that the game is still due for release in 2002 with a different publisher, and the company is also at work on *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*.

Namco adopts inclusive stance

Namco has said it is to develop a range of peripherals for PlayStation2 to make videogames more accessible to the physically handicapped. Spokesman Hiromichi Kawaguchi has announced that clinical trials will take place from April to test the controllers, which will vary in design to cater for a range of disabilities. The step builds on the company's 15-year record of developing equipment for the disabled.

New Broken Sword details emerge

New details have emerged regarding Bam Entertainment's GBA conversion of classic adventure game *Broken Sword*, due for an early 2002 release. The game will benefit from advanced data compression to fit it all on to a GBA cartridge, and a revised interface more suited to the GBA controls. It will also feature several easter eggs to reward players already familiar with the title.

Team 17 teams up with G-Cluster

Team 17 has announced a partnership with G-cluster, a company devoted to bringing networking and server technologies to handheld devices, set top boxes and in-flight entertainment systems. The developer's multiplayer title, *Worms World Party*, will be the first game available over G-cluster technology.

Kuju continues handheld development

Kuju Entertainment has unveiled a technology demo for Motorola's DragonBall MX1 microprocessor, designed for use in wireless devices, PDAs and web browsers. Entitled Kujuxians, the demo raises the possibility of videogames featuring speedy, full colour graphics over a wide range of devices.

Amstrad in Spectrum link up

Judging by adverts taken out in trade papers recently, Amstrad has been snapping up copyrights to classic Sinclair and Spectrum titles. While the company has yet to comment, the ads refer to "an exciting new project due to launch in 2002"". It's more than likely that the company is planning to take advantage of new market opportunities presented by interactive devices such as set top boxes, mobile phones and PDAs.

Advanced mapping

When Kuju couldn't find the right mapping tool for its Game Boy Advance project, it decided to make its own

Harry Denholm, software engineer, Kuju



Everyone's invited

Released under a modified license, known as the Kuju open source licence, 'Mapster' is available as a 1.5Mb download from the developer's Website. The executable and sample files are a mere 400-odd K, with the rest comprising of the manual. The program itself runs on Win98 and Win2000, and supports the transparency effects of the latter.

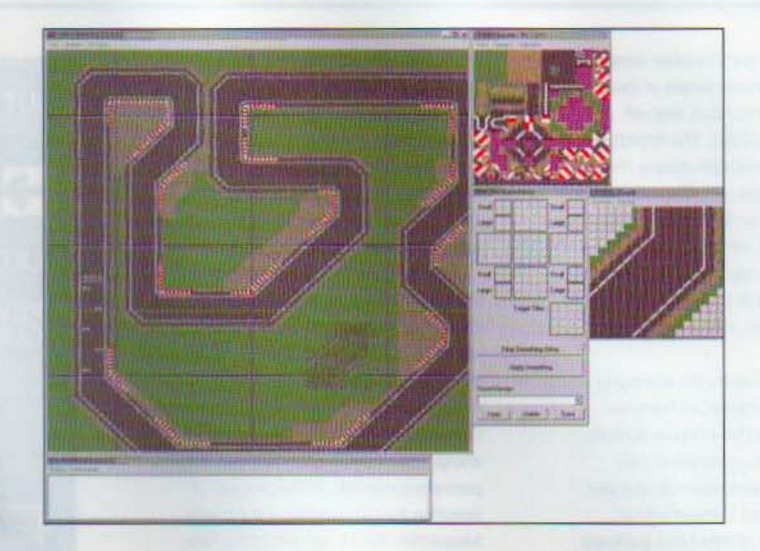
"If people want to add to the functionality of 'Mapster', they can send the modified code back to us. We'll make sure it's all in place and working and then it can be re-released on our Website," says Harry Denholm. Next on his to-do list is writing a scripting language for the utility – something he is hoping the GBA programming community might be able to help with. "If people like 'Mapster' and take it onboard, it will encourage us to release some more tools," he predicts. Next week however, Denholm is back to the delights of programming PlayStation2's peculiar architecture. "The PlayStation2 is a fantastic console, but writing your own tools would be a lengthy process," he says. "Mapster was rewarding because you can get something built and working very quickly."

While 'Codeshop' usually focuses on highly complex technologies, there's still the occasional reminder that the lone coder can make his mark in the development process. One example is Kuju's 'Mapster' utility for the Game Boy Advance, which has been released under an open source licence from the developer's Website.

"The problem occurred a couple of months ago when we were working on some Game Boy Advance games, which were using the hardware's ability to render tile-based graphics quickly. Unfortunately there weren't any good authoring paths available," explains Kuju software engineer **Harry Denholm.** "To get art assets into our game engine, we were having to put them through something like six different applications."

There were a couple of commercial tools available and Kuju's attitude was that if it was going to spend money on tools, it wanted the source code as well so it would be able to modify it later. More research revealed another possible solution. Called 'Tumeric', the freeware mapping tool was flexible but ran on DOS and only supported a low resolution of 320x240 pixels.

"We didn't have the time to get up to speed on it and anyway it might not have done everything we needed, so I said, 'I can probably write a tool in a day-and-a-half'," Denholm recalls. One week later, Kuju's artists were using 'Mapster' to design levels, which previously had taken days to complete, in a matter of hours.



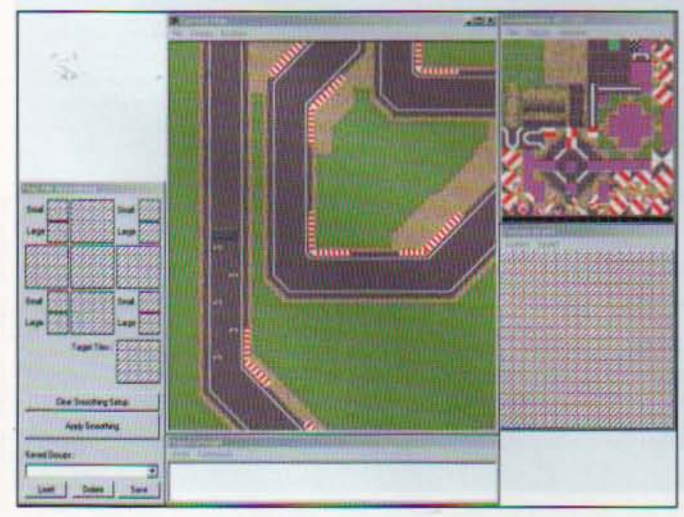
"The application makes maps, basically," deadpans Denholm. Artists create a palette of 8x8 pixel tiles and then can simply place them onto an arbitrary-sized background to create their levels. One neat addition implemented was a smoothing function that allows artists to automatically blend between the different tiles. "It took the artists hours to blend all the areas together, it was a real pain. So we wrote this little tool in 'Mapster' to do it," says Denholm. "It was great because we could solve other problems from within 'Mapster' as it was custom written."

The resultant map file is exported from 'Mapster' as a high resolution high bit-depth TGA image. "We know the pipeline from the authoring tool to the game engine can be different for each developer so there's no point writing a specialist exporter," Denholm explains. "But as an image file, people can do what they want with it. And because we've released the 'Mapster' source code they can write an exporter to their game engine. The whole point of 'Mapster' is creating an easily configurable authoring tool so we've tried not to lock it down to any particular paths."

URL www.kuju.com



Developed for an as-yet-unannounced Kuju Game Boy Advance game, the open source version of 'Mapster' comes complete with sample art from a topdown racing demo



Using 'Mapster', artists can set up a palette of different 8x8 pixel tiles which they can then simply place to create the overall level background

The name game

Jeffery Hutt, CEO, LithTech

As middleware comes of age, LithTech is making its technology stand out thanks to some funky branding





Aliens Vs Predator 2 is an example of a time-sensitive project which employed LithTech's 'Talon' system to ensure its release date was met



Connected development

Connected development
One of the big issues for middleware vendors at present is integration within clients' production pipelines. It's not something that bothers Jeffery Hutt however. "Many middleware companies rely on integrating other technologies because they don't provide comprehensive solutions. Each of our products includes multiple technologies such as rendering, sound, physics, networking and animation," he says. "We also provide developers with a full suite of content creation tools. Of course, our technology uses a modular architecture, so it's feasible for a developer to hook in another technology if they wish."

The selling point of middleware used to be the quality of the technology. Now, with the battle for mainstream acceptance over, more ethereal issues are coming into focus. For US vendor LithTech this means a sparkling set of new names for its suite of tools.

Previously defined under the umbrella nomenclature, 'the LithTech Engine', the different options available are now demarcated by the names 'Cobalt', 'Jupiter', 'Talon' and the forthcoming 'Discovery'. The 'Jupiter' system is LithTech's cutting-edge engine, and is being used by sister company Monolith to develop *No One Lives Forever 2*. 'Talon' offers a more solid environment ensuring developers can meet tight deadlines with less risk. Monolith has used this to complete *Aliens Vs Predator 2*.

"I don't think there will be a stigma for developers using 'Talon'," explains LithTech CEO **Jeffery Hutt**, when asked if developers might have a problem admitting they aren't using the most feature-heavy engine available. "Some developers create products that take more than a year, while many others must meet the challenge of producing games in less time," he says. "Since 'Talon' is targeted at developers shipping games during the next 6–12 months, I am confident they will be armed with the horsepower to create games that are on a par or superior to the technology in other leading games."

With cross-platform development a crucial aspect of middleware, 'Cobalt' features as LithTech's first generation PlayStation2 offering, which is currently being used to port *No One Lives Forever 2* from the PC. A second-generation technology will be released in 2002, as will an Xbox product, which has been tentatively named 'Nautilus'. The pricing model for 'Jupiter' is $250K per product, per platform, while 'Talon' and 'Cobalt' are available for $75K, with the same conditions.

Perhaps the most interesting of the suite though is 'Discovery', LithTech's long-awaited massively multiplayer server technology. "'Discovery', which combines 'Jupiter'-level graphics with a complete multi-server networking module, will be the pre-eminent licensed technology for developers of Massively MultiPlayer (MMP) games," predicts Hutt. "When I visited Korea recently, developers wanted to learn about 'Discovery' and the details of developing LithTech-powered online games. While the MMP market is relatively young, there's no question that we see a lot of growth in online gaming, particularly in markets where the broadband infrastructure is ahead of the US." As with the other systems, 'Discovery' is already being used by Monolith in an as-yet-unannounced game.

LithTech's involvement in online gaming has also been strengthened by its deal with Real Networks. Its technology is used in Real's electronic game distribution platform 'RealArcade'. "We're very enthusiastic about 'RealArcade'," says Hutt. "In addition to the standard retail channel, 'RealArcade' represents an excellent opportunity for established developers and publishers to release LithTech-powered games electronically and earn extra revenue. Real has broadened 'RealArcade' so it supports streaming and downloadable games. I really like the flexibility this provides because developers aren't required to produce a special downloadable version of their game."

URL www.lithtech.com





LithTech's 'Jupiter' technology is its cutting-edge product which is being used to develop the sequel to *No One Lives Forever*. These screens are taken from work in progress

OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



'It' revealed: inventor Dean Kamen's single-person human transporter, Segway, makes its debut





Unfortunately, the comical Segway video does little more than make its passengers look foolish



Videogame devotees should make the pilgrimage to the Barbican's Game On exhibition





Game On's celebration of 40 years of videogaming includes many classic systems, such as Atari's VCS

01 Segway to success

US: About a year ago, the Internet was awash with rumours of a radical new device, known only as 'It'. Suggestions ranged from gyroscopically-balanced two-wheeled personal transporter to an anti-gravity vehicle. Sadly, those who plumped for the gyroscopically-balanced two-wheeled personal transporter got it bang on, and the end result is the Segway HT (human transporter). Though fairly basic in appearance, Segway is loaded with state-of-the-art high-techery, including twin 2hp brushless electric motors, and an inertial sensor assembly developed by British Aerospace. Two tilt sensors and five gyroscopes work in concert to maintain the machine's upright orientation. While many famous pundits have hailed Segway as an epoch-making breakthrough, the corporate video (downloadable from www.segway.com) is unintentionally hilarious.

02 Game On for videogames

UK: There have been many written histories charting the rise of videogames, but good exhibitions, displaying key hardware releases and contextual social comment, have been thin on the ground. To change all this the Barbican Gallery in London is organising an exhibition which explores the 40-year history of computer gaming (1962-2002) and analyses the creativity and influence of videogames on contemporary culture. On show from 16th May to 15th September, visitors can expect to learn about the essence of the form by exploring 11 themed sections. Some 250 exhibits will be on display including the first arcade game, *Space War* (1971), right up to more modern developments including Nintendo's GameCube. But don't worry, the consoles won't just be hiding inside glass cabinets, there'll be an area set aside with over 40 playable games. Go to www.barbican.org.uk for more information.

Soundbytes

"Like living cartoons, games such as the GameCube's *Luigi's Castle* are unique environments down to the smallest detail."
Terry Wilson trips himself up in the 'Denver Business Journal'

"The infrastructure isn't there yet, so we're not at the point of announcing it. I know some people think Nintendo will be in trouble once online games become more popular because we were so conservative, but we already have games that use communication, and we're still looking into online servers. We can dive right in."
Shigeru Miyamoto defends Nintendo's lack of commitment to the online arena in www.video-senki.com

"Hiroaki Yotoriyama and his team at Namco Development Dept#1 are back and must do what others so far have failed to accomplish: They must top themselves."
A poignant editorial blooper in 'NextGen' magazine

"Some people think he is Lara Croft, they don't even know he is a real person."
Rally driver Richard Burns retaliates to Colin McRae's rebuke that he has a big head at www.eurosport.co.uk

03 Eightplayer football on the cards

Japan: Along with one of the longest names of a videogame in recent memory, Sega's latest football title is likely to take up a lot of space in any Japanese arcade emporium. *World Club Football Serie A 2001-2002* looks like kick-starting football fever in Japan in preparation for the World Cup. Team selection and strategies are so complex that starter packs must be bought from vendors which includes 11 player IC-cards and club team records. User's can set team formations by displaying the trading cards on screen with data from the matches downloaded in realtime as the match progresses. It is even possible to have eightplayer frenzies. Perfect for recapturing those school playground sessions when everyone herded around the ball.

04 Siemens invaders

Europe: Get ready for the wave of Java-enabled mobile devices arriving in Europe next year. Moreover, prepare yourself for the glut of retro classics which are about to make use of the new technology. Digital Bridges and iFone are set to bring Taito and Atari classics, respectively, to portable devices. Though cost and pay schemes have still to be decided, games such as *Frogger*, *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Pong* and *Space Invaders* are set to make the current trend for nostalgia even more ubiquitous.

05 GBA Pocket Music

UK: The first non-game application for PS2 – Jester Interactive's *Music Generator 2* – is about to appear in slimmed-down pocket form on GBA. The concept is the same: pick 'n' mix from some 600 samples, sequence them onto a timeline, and produce what might be loosely categorised as music. The sound is understandably tinny, but as an engaging train journey killer (or even a musician's electronic Post-It note), *Pocket Music* is less of a novelty than you might imagine.

Data Stream

Number of places occupied by Harry Potter titles in Waterstone's list of the top five best-selling UK paperbacks for the week ending November 17: **5**

Number of people interested in purchasing *Neocron* that are considering upgrading to a broadband internet connection according to publisher, CDV: **86%**

Sports Interactive's ranking in The Sunday Times ARM Tech Track 100: **22**

Vis Entertainment's ranking in The Sunday Times ARM Tech Track 100: **51**

Ranking of Blitz Games in The Sunday Times ARM Tech Track 100: **73**

Ranking of Eutechnyx in The Sunday Times ARM Tech Track 100: **99**

Amount analysts expect chip maker ATI to earn from GameCube sales by March 2002: **$32 million (£22.6m)**

Number of US households which own a videogame console according to the Yankee Group: **36 million**

Sega's extraordinary loss from disposal of assets and losses on securities holdings: **¥28.8 billion (£164 million)**



One of the biggest coin-op set-ups ever: the eightplayer version of *World Club Football Serie A*





Unlike most coin-ops, team strategies can be set up before play – or downloaded from IC cards







Old games never die, they just keep turning up on state-of-the-art communication devices



Pocket Music on GBA: effectively a cut-down version of *Music Generator 2* on PS2

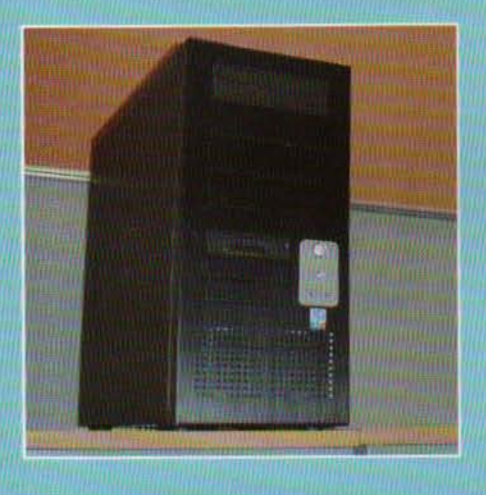


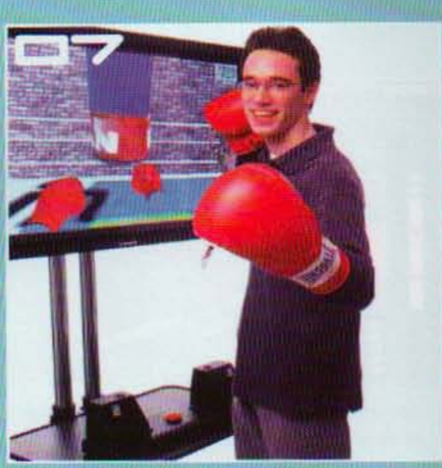
Different 'skins' are available for the sequencer, depending on personal taste – or lack thereof

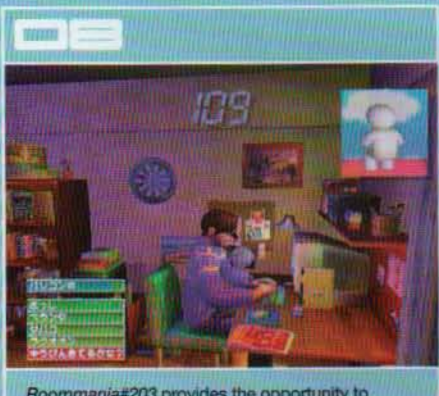


What the discerning, well-heeled PC gamer uses: **Edge**'s iWin PC is now installed in its own office



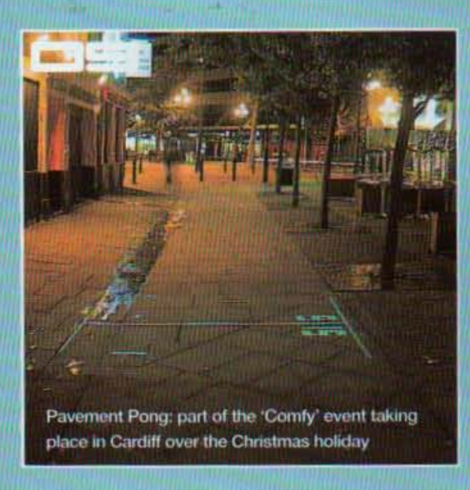






Roommania#203 provides the opportunity to torment a little computer person. Hang on...





Pavement Pong: part of the 'Comfy' event taking place in Cardiff over the Christmas holiday



A very PC Christmas present

UK: Deep Thought, Deep Blue, ASCI White. The world has seen some impressive supercomputers, but when it comes to a dedicated games PC **Edge**'s new iPC, built by www.iwantitnow.co.uk might trump them all. With a 1.7GHz P4 processor, 256MB RAM and an Nvidia GeForce 3 graphics card, it certainly makes a welcome change from The Difference Engine which seemed to be powering **Edge**'s last ailing model.

Punch out

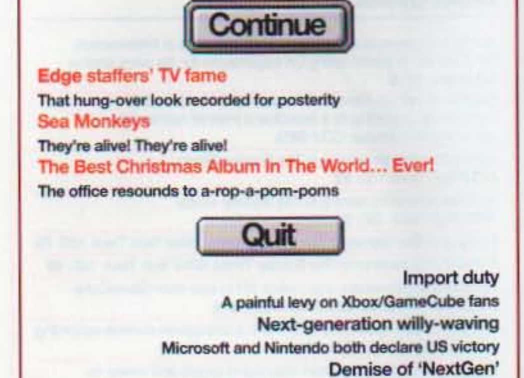
UK: Game-Trak, created by inventor Elliot Myers, is able to track the position of boxing gloves and move them around onscreen, making it possible to hit a virtual punchbag from any conceivable angle. The hardware could retail at under £20, and is applicable to more than mere boxing games. Its success, though, depends on the presence of software more compelling than a punchbag with the 'Rocky' soundtrack. Go to www.in2games.uk.com.

RAM mates

Japan: It's not be the first version of *Roommania#203* to appear in Japan (the Dreamcast version appeared last year) but the popular voyeuristic franchise – now coming to PS2 – could have been inspired by one of the UK's most quirky retro classics, *Little Computer People*. Though 15 years span their releases the manner in which the hero can be influenced by operating items in his environment is unerringly similar. Next they'll be stealing the high-concept idea that was *Fat Worm Blows A Sparky*.

Cardiff Streets Pong

Wales: Comfy is a Cardiff-wide event which looks to beguile visitors over the Christmas period with a number of entertaining yet relaxing exhibitions. One such 'installation' at the g39 gallery in Mill Lane is designed by Chris Evans and allows users to have a gentle game of *Pong*, while at the same time projecting their skills onto the pavement outside. It's a cleverly crafted street art; though those adverse to stepping on cracks in the pavement may find the moving components just too overwhelming.



Continue

Edge staffers' TV fame
That hung-over look recorded for posterity

Sea Monkeys
They're alive! They're alive!

The Best Christmas Album In The World... Ever!
The office resounds to a-rop-a-pom-poms

Quit

Import duty
A painful levy on Xbox/GameCube fans

Next-generation willy-waving
Microsoft and Nintendo both declare US victory

Demise of 'NextGen'
Nigel Edge looks to the labour exchange



10 Altered Carbon

Books have long inspired videogame plots, but Richard Morgan's debut thriller must be the first science fiction novel to switch the influence around. In 'Altered Carbon' death is just like getting fried in *Half-Life* – a temporary setback. At worst death is nothing more than a painless prison sentence; you're simply taken out of the 'game' until you've done your time. When the time comes your consciousness, stored on a 'cortical stack', can be downloaded into a new 'sleeve' (read body) and – presto – you're back in action.

Morgan fastforwards us to 2411, a noirish Ridley Scott-esque world saturated in drugs, surveillance equipment and maximum-damage hardware. Takeshi Kovacs – serving a death sentence – has been prematurely 're-sleeved' in another wanted criminal's body. Kovacs, a maverick private-eye and former member of the UN Envoy Corps, is a qualified killer. Unsurprisingly, he's been brought to Earth and resurrected by millionaire Laurens J Bancroft to perform a twisted mission: to investigate Bancroft's own death. The millionaire, himself recently re-sleeved, says it was no suicide – despite the police verdict.

What follows is a gory trip slicing through a 25th Century San Francisco, the stage for the lowly trade in rented or confiscated bodies used for 're-sleeving'. Morgan takes to the extreme the idea that life is recyclable. In a world where life is so cheap, violence escalates to new heights because you've got nothing to lose. Also, interrogation in virtual reality means they can torture you to death, and then do it all over again.

It's a bloodbath of ideas that will appeal to any hardcore *Half-Lifer*. But while the build-up promises much, the ending disappoints with a simpleton's monologue where the arch-villain explains his Machiavellian scheme. Pacey, techno-junk reading for the blood-lust generation.

11 The Animator's Survival Kit

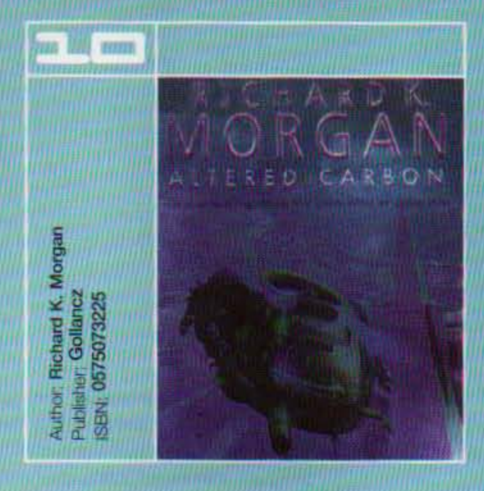
Despite a lengthy subtitle that embraces the videogame animation community, 'The Animator's Survival Kit' doesn't feature any tutorials elucidating the finer points of *3DS Max* or *Maya*. Arising out of a series of masterclasses given by the author, Richard Williams, the widely celebrated Oscar winning director of animation on 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit', there's a significant emphasis on traditional techniques that may deter some animators working within the videogame industry.

But to do so would disregard the central theme. Though it is part biography, part potted history of animation, part introduction to the traditional animation process, and part guide to technique, the overwhelming sense is that Williams has essentially constructed a paean towards a simplicity of approach, and cultured an attitude that is receptive to lifelong learning.

Starting at the very beginning, Williams takes readers on a hugely satisfying journey that begins with an introduction to the early history of animation, and segues into his own experiences learning from early animators, such as Ken Harris and Grim Natwick. Lavishly illustrated throughout, the book is a loving distillation of Williams' 60-year obsession with the medium, covering everything from the basic techniques of timing and spacing, to the finer details of lip-synching and directing a studio, in a clear, concise, and comprehensive manner.

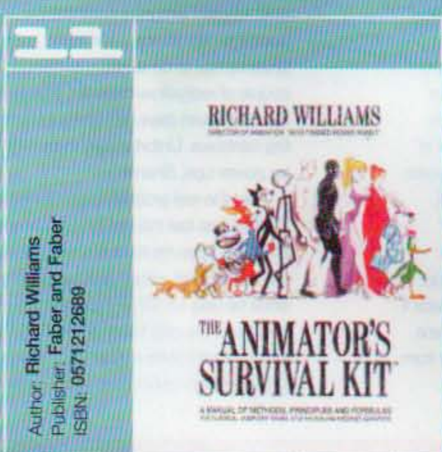
For anybody interested in animation, 'The Animator's Survival Kit' is simply a prerequisite. Anybody who isn't interested in animation will probably find that, having read it, they soon will be.

10



Author: **Richard K. Morgan**
Publisher: **Gollancz**
ISBN: **0575073225**

11



Author: **Richard Williams**
Publisher: **Faber and Faber**
ISBN: **0571212689**

12



Site: **Gorillaz**
URL: **www.gorillaz.com**

12 Web site of the month

It might seem a little late to endorse virtual celebrity band, Gorillaz, what with them having already stormed the charts. But anybody logging onto their site before January 18 has a chance of winning an Xbox two months before they are officially available in the UK. In any case, the Shockwave-developed interactive recreation of Kong Studios, boasts a whole host of entertainment riches, from a Geep simulator, through to a graffiti arena, a computer desktop and a 5-Track to mess around with – even if you can't stand the music.

13



13 Advertainment

Japan: The first title to come from Brownie Brown, a Nintendo-funded development studio made up of former *Secret Of Mana* team members, *Magical Vacation* is a standard RPG which tells the story of a young magic apprentice who is sent to another dimension by evil forces intent on conquering his world.

01 Game Boy Advance 02-03 "Where are you? Where are you all gone?" 04 "Don't leave me alone…" 05-07 "I promise… I promise I'll save you all!" 08 Voiceover (for rest of advert): "The most powerful weapon is friendship." 09-10 "Make your selection from 15 characters and go forth into battle." 11-13 "Decide your destiny." 14 "*Magical Vacation*"

It's not like it was against the referee's brief summation of the rules, which, for the record, was "five-a-side, seven minutes each way, no balls over head height, and no concealed weapons". You could blame the *Brutal Deluxe* nature of post-office football, or the worn-down treads on RedEye's Adidas, both of which certainly have something to do with the situation RedEye finds himself in. But really, it's easier to blame human nature. It seems you either love RedEye, or you hate him – either of which, of course, is fine, since there's nothing worse than inspiring mediocrity. Except actual physical pain. Ahaha. Ow.

The three key events of Wednesday night's game. Event one: during the pre-match warm-up, RedEye catches the ball full on the volley, and sees it soar into the gallery, straight into an onlookers face. She falls over backwards, slapstick, disappears from view, rises with blood streaming from her nose.

The present smells of iodine, and everything feels like cotton wool, and oh, it hurts. RedEye looks across to his shelf, at the line of perfect-white pharmacy child-locked bottles, chemical Russian dolls labelled with incomprehensible science. He pops the cap off one – something of a feat in itself, since he has to do all this one-handed – and drops a couple of red/yellow capsules onto his keyboard. For the next seven days he's going to be on a cocktail of tiny rainbows. Unfortunately, none of them appear to be power-ups. Shame.

But the real problem is that for the next month, RedEye has lost the use of his right arm, which impinges upon his favourite recreational activity. No, not that, or that, either, and he hasn't done *that* since he was 12. Of all the videogames in his recent collection, the only two that RedEye can play in this incapacitated state are *Dance Dance Revolution* (albeit for high stakes; slip, and RedEye's enforced

RedEye's not asking for every game to be like this; some things warrant control complexity. But a lot of games don't, and overcomplicating their interfaces just excludes people: Why can't we just make things easier for everyone?

Perhaps we don't want to. Our club is exclusive and comfortable, and we're scared that massmarket appeal might change that. We don't push for accessibility or simpler controls because then we'd lose the value of our arcane knowledge. The industry don't notice the complexity because they're too busy coding interfaces incomprehensible to outsiders, following unwritten rules on cryptic, otherworldly systems handed down through the generations. *Ico* showed the way by offering a beautifully clean screen and a world that behaved exactly how it should – a world that didn't need an instruction booklet, or a percentage health system. Avoid losing girl for high score. That's it.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Game controls: making things easier?

A friend comforts her, motioning at one of the opposition – let's call him Zangief – to stay where he is. Zangief stares at RedEye and gives him a nod. This is not a friendly nod. This nod says Face Crunch. This nod says Spinning Piledriver.

Event two: RedEye, having managed to keep out of the way of the ball for much of the game and thus out of Zangief's thunder, receives possession somewhere near the touchline. Discretion being the better part of valour, there is only one option, and that is to run. Fear propels him like lightning down the side of the beige rec-centre hall. He is acutely aware that something is coming at him from the side with a momentum approaching that of one of 18-Wheeler's finest. He tries to change direction. He slips.

Event three: contact, and RedEye spirals through the air, flipping, spinning, losing track of which way is up. Split-split-seconds stretch to hours, and gravity seems nowhere; he thrusts out an arm to provide a clue. Then everything speeds up, the floor rises up to meet RedEye and the sound of something snapping echoes round the gym. It's like nothing he's ever felt; strobes of headache white compressed into a millionth of a second, a rusty '50s Slinky Spring constricting at light speed around his right wrist. He vomits, and that is the last thing he remembers. RedEye blacks out.

absence from gaming might become permanent) and *Super Monkey Ball*.

Excuse this selfish moment of emotional philanthropy, but what happens to gamers for whom using both hands isn't an option? The Xbox pad has six face buttons, two triggers, two analogue sticks, Start, Back, and a D-pad. *Halo* uses everything but the D-pad, and allows only limited reconfiguring, which can prove a game-terminal problem for anyone with restricted digits. Convenient, then, that while he's incapacitated, surfing the Web one-handed as he suspects a great majority of Internet users do, a little research reveals Namco, supported by the Japanese government, are producing peripherals for disabled gamers.

The real solution, though, has to be minimalism at the design stage, as exhibited in *Super Monkey Ball*. A simple control system doesn't just aid gamers with disabilities; remember the first time you ever used a DualShock? "And X does this, and R2 does this, and Select changes the camera. And circle... damn. What does X do again?" It wasn't always instinctive, and not everyone has the patience to get past the first hour of clumsy acclimatisation.

Some things warrant control complexity. But a lot of game's don't, and overcomplicating their interfaces just excludes people

So it comes to this: Thanks to a reckless volley and the piercing crack of bone on varnished wood, Wednesday night football is temporarily replaced by its digital equivalent. Not Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer*, which requires the ability to both memorise and use four face buttons, four triggers, and two analogue sticks, but by a Commodore Amiga, a one button joystick, and Sensible's ten-year-old work of majesty. Both games replace a two-footed dynamic with a hand-based approximation, and neither qualify as simulations. Developers can assign dozens of buttons to every conceivable Cruyff turn, but they'll still never precisely mimic the way football is – the way it feels to race with the ball and to lose control; to regain consciousness surrounded by friends and a weeping Russian giant; to find yourself breathless and covered in your own sick and with new angles in your bone structure. *Pro Evolution Soccer* entertains immeasurably, but it's built for us. *Sensible* is for everyone, and that's what gaming really lacks.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge's***



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Cut-scenes: the poor relation of next-gen gaming

The graphical power of the new generation of consoles has, quirkily, entailed a reduction of quality in one aspect of videogames: the cut-scene. It used to be that cut-scenes in FMV were lovingly rendered on hardware much more powerful than the host console, and then streamed off disc. But these days many developers seem happy to render cut-scenes with the game's own graphics engine. So we're watching cut-scenes of lower visual quality than in the past, and yet we seem to be watching ever more of them.

This is a bad omen. Even in *Metal Gear Solid 2*, the sheer amount of cut-scenes surprises. Although they are of consistently higher quality than the lamentable videogame average, their preponderance makes you wonder whether Hideo Kojima might not really prefer to make films. Given a matrix of GScubes, the opening scenes, from the bridge to Snake's tanker infiltration, could stand comparison with any number of studio actioners. All power to Kojima-san if he wants to overturn the nauseating example of Squaresoft's *Final Fantasy* movie (a really long, boring and incoherent cut-scene) and make a CGI feature that's actually a good film. But do we really want him to practise doing that on our time?

Everyone knows that the problem with cut-scenes is that you can't play them. But they become even more alienating when they seem to be used as a dumping ground for actions and scenes that cannot be managed in real-time gameplay. Now it could be argued that in *MGS2*, Kojima uses the tradition of the cut-scene to toy creatively with the player's expectations. By introducing an enemy in a cut-scene and readying you for battle, only to reveal that you won't be fighting right now, the game effectively raises its level of unpredictability and thus excitement. Yet a player might justifiably feel cheated by being locked out of any participation in the dramatic, lengthy scene that closes the game's first chapter.

We might give *MGS2* the benefit of the doubt, given that it still boasts a great number of gameplay set-pieces that are engineered with extraordinary inventiveness and attention to detail. But the cut-scene as dumping ground for what the interactive engine can't manage is all too apparent in other games. To name just one recent example, for instance, *Silent Hill 2* has such shockingly unsophisticated animation and control for the player's character that it needs a cut-scene just to show you climbing through a couple of pieces of wood nailed across a passageway. The repetitive footstep animation that pops up every time you enter a new room, moreover, is not only annoying but bizarrely illogical. If I'm walking along a leaf-strewn path, why are my footprints white on black? At least the *Resident Evil* games have the grace to change the features of the creaky opening door – great, this time it's panelled oak; now I'm really frightened – depending on your location.

The prime example of what gets dumped in a cut-scene, though, is interaction with non-player characters. Aside from the sporadic and unsatisfactory attempts at interactive dialogue, for instance in *Outcast* or *Deus Ex*, conversations are mostly relegated to little snatches of digital drama, framed in a boring two-shot and acted with all the thespian vim of Will Self on downers.

This is when videogames step most clumsily on the toes of cinema, that old-school multimedia competitor which they view with an unfortunate mixture of superiority and craven envy. And it is when the aesthetic gulf between cinema and videogames becomes most painfully apparent. Wearily, we sit through risible writing, or awful voice-acting, or woodenly programmed gestures that make the characters look like people who failed the audition for 'Thunderbirds'. And being forced to watch your character saying really sappy or just plain dumb things can do immense damage to your psychological identification with him or her.

A cut-scene should establish atmosphere or relay information, and then get the hell out of the way so can we start playing

Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of such scenes, though, is the fact that they have subtitles. Sure, usually you can turn them off, but the default is to have English subtitles along with the English voice-acting. This is an extremely odd experience, but it's often necessary – as when *MGS2*'s subtitles provide parenthetical explanations of all the amusingly silly military acronyms that the characters blithely refer to in their speech. The problem is that it distracts attention from, and therefore devalues, the voice. Why bother getting better actors, people who can actually deliver the script so that it makes some sense, when the player can read the text simultaneously? And if we're going to have subtitles, I for one would far rather listen to the original language. I don't watch the dubbed version of 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' on DVD; if we want to take videogames seriously as aesthetic artefacts – as seriously as we do films – then why should I be forced to buy a dubbed game?

When money and attention is lavished on cut-scenes at the expense of pushing forward developments in interactivity and player freedom, something is clearly wrong. On the other hand, despite their widespread abuse, it is clear that cut-scenes can serve a positive purpose. Good cut-scenes can effectively enlarge the fictional scope of the game universe. A fine example is to be found, perhaps surprisingly, in *Ace Combat 4*. In between the whizzy naturalistic 3D of the flying missions, the game tells a downbeat story of war using a totally different aesthetic style: its beautifully stylised cartoon frames set up an interesting counterpoint to the straightforward arcade nature of the gameplay.

However, perhaps it is *Grand Theft Auto III* that best understands how to keep it short and sweet: simply describe the mission, and send the player quickly back out into the streets. The role of a cut-scene should be to establish atmosphere or relay essential information, and then to get the hell out of the way so we can start playing.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

How has 2001 has been for all of you? Exciting? Disappointing? As for me, it has been a very exciting one! The reason is simple: I developed my GameCube project. Sure we have been very busy and it has been quite a hard project, but I learned a lot and it gave me greater confidence.

The most difficult issues I had to face were certainly the time and the size of the team. Both were so tight! I can't tell in details but in the case of *Super Monkey Ball*, I didn't even have a year to develop it, just more than six months. Plus, there were only a dozen staff on it. More, it was the very first time I had worked on a brand new piece of hardware (not Sega's). Well, it had to be hard!

However, we managed to release the game for the launch and I have to thank my staff for that. I can't forget the great support I had from Nintendo. I really thank them for their help. I had many worries back at that time. "What if we can't develop a friendly working environment with Nintendo?" "What if they do not provide us with sufficient technical support?" Yes I had many worries. However, I experienced on many occasions smoother ways to work with Nintendo than in a Sega-only environment. We integrated these positive lessons into our company. That has been very instructive indeed. Well, that's it for Nintendo and my project. Let's talk about my vision of the industry in 2001.

– There was no radical change but I see a few points, which may have interesting consequences to the future of this industry. Because of that, 2001 has been an interesting year for me, but many bad things occurred as well – such as the lack of change. Our business has to evolve; this has been the rule for years. If not, the industry would not have been able to develop this far. And because no big change occurred in 2001 that makes me sad. Despite many elements pushing for change to happen, it did not.

For example, new consoles have been launched, with two of them in the same year! Plus, compared to previous years, many big titles have been announced. In addition, there were many subjects related to videogames like 'Final Fantasy' the movie. Even with all these things, I have the feeling the industry has not evolved this year. I have one explanation among others – I think there has been no adventure. Of course the environment is far from favourable for such moves, but the current trend is 'no risk taking'. Worse, I have the feeling that many are waiting for others to take these risks. For example, games are not selling well, right? So, what to do? Well, I would suggest to wonder what would be fun to develop, but current thinking is more negative. People start to say "This is not selling", "This not good enough" or "This can't work". Then the same people look around and say "Look this is working. So let's do the same" or "Let's release our title after theirs because then the market will be favourable for us." I can't stand these trends. I think this is madness, no?

Now let's speak about the good things. With the official end of Dreamcast, Sega gave up its hardware business. Then it started a new life as software maker. And following this new path, Sega decided a multi-platform strategy. Great! However, it is not yet fully delivering. I don't want to criticise my company but from my point of view, I think Sega is still only making conversions of its most famous DC titles to others consoles. This is a side move, one console to another, in order to create volume. Of course this is not wrong but Sega's development power potential is not exploited at all. We can deliver more enjoyable games to users, in a vertical way. I mean going forwards, not just sideways.

I think this applies to every company. For example, *VF4* is going to be released on PS2. I like this title very much and I think it will sell well. But, from a user's perspective, looking at the game content I would see only two interesting features. One is how Sega will deliver on PS2 knowing the company is famous for its development skills. The second point is how many copies the game is going to sell. Even if the game comes to another console like Xbox, I guess people would again be interested in these two points.

Now what if *VF4* would have integrated new features like 'Virtua Fighter Real Net Battle' in order to make the game appealing to Net users. Or what about another feature like 'Virtua Fighter Character Battle', which would mix *VF* characters with some from another company. Or even what if an append disk system is included so it would have been able to change entire aspects of the game like rules or adding new characters, etc. Would that be more challenging, interesting? I think this would help the game touch new markets, address a broader audience. However, speaking like this I would be told "Okay clever guy, so why you don't do such things first?" Well, I'm starting the process already.

I'm working at this moment in order to have users say, "Whoa, the industry is now capable of delivering such things!" or " Yeah, that looks interesting!" I have the feeling I have already said this before. *Super Monkey Ball* has been a field of study for us in that perspective. Easy and friendly game play, plus multiplayer-ready. Of course this is not new in my work, but the fact we had to target a younger audience and design something cute have been new challenges for us. I believe we did it.

So now it is released, it gives more confidence for the future regarding our potential. But this is only a start line; the real stuff is beginning now. I'm focused on my vision at this moment. I can't describe it in detail of course, but thinking of it makes me feel very excited. Plus, in other companies, I hear some very promising stories. Yes, great ideas are coming! I hope they will be translated into great titles.

Fighting with ideas is the best way, the right way for this industry to keep going forward. Then, looking at 2001, I understand that the time you attracted people's attention with large-budget projects is over. I think this is positive. I'm working hard so year 2002 will be our true multi-platform start. See you soon!





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

The videogames industry: a review of 2001

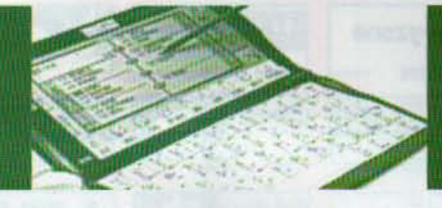
The current trend is 'no risk taking'. Worse, I have the feeling that many are waiting for others to take the risks

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Well, it's been more than a year since we wrote our first developer diary. Over the course of eight articles we have chronicled Brain In A Jar's ups and downs in the games industry. Although everyone here has been developing games for some time, this has been our first taste of going it alone, and it has certainly been an eye-opener.

Despite having one game canned through no fault of our own, nearly running out of cash on several occasions, struggling to get a deal out of an industry cutting back on all fronts, working in a cold and leaky office through a miserable winter and fending off take-overs, buy outs and bailiffs from a number of sources, we are still here.

In fact not only are we still here, but we're thriving. With a nice warm and dry office in the countryside, a development deal which pays real money and a team which, by January will have grown from eight to eleven, it's looking like we have served our time roasting in development purgatory and things are looking up.



VIDEOGAME DIARY

Nigel Kershaw, designer, Brain In A Jar

Part nine: state of independence

All this shows how determined we were to make it all work, and despite the odds stacked against us, we managed to keep going no matter how bad things looked. If Brain In a Jar had been a development team within a large publisher, we would never have experienced these problems, but that's because we would have all been laid off at the first sign of trouble. Our independence from shareholders, venture capital and anyone not directly related to the task at hand was the key to our survival.

Thankfully all that nonsense is now water under the bridge, and we're full swing into the development of our as-yet unmentionable title for an as-yet unmentionable publisher. There will be an announcement towards the end of January or early February when all will be revealed, but until then I'll just call it 'Bob'.

Bob is a licensed game and as such it presents an entirely different challenge to a games designer than the development of an original title. I have written countless original games designs over the years – some have made it to market, others have fallen by the wayside, but they're essentially all an exercise in what I like to call 'making shit up'. Okay, it may be trivialising the whole process, but the point is if you want a three-headed space goat in there you can have one.

However the design of a licensed game is an entirely different beast. The only way you're going to get a three-headed space goat in there is if it is Zangor the three-headed space goat™ with his own comic book, TV series, line of action figures, and forthcoming big budget Hollywood movie. With every aspect of the Zangor game subject to approval by the creator, his TV station, their media corporation and a whole army of lawyers, the games designer must treat the property with the utmost care, and try not to do this at the expense of a good game.

Writing the games design for Bob was going to be an interesting process for me. Memories of my previous encounters developing licensed games still gave me the willies, and seeing this rigidly enforced environment with little room for 'making shit up' which had to be shaped into an original and fun game gave me little comfort.

Our independence from shareholders, venture capital and anyone not directly related to the task at hand was the key to our survival

I needn't have worried though; for once I began to get stuck into the process of pulling a design together, my initial reservations melted away. The nuances of Bob's licence and its suitability for turning into a videogame soon became apparent, and I began to really enjoy the process of working on the often overlooked areas of a design. With the broad sweep of the game already decided for me, I could concentrate on things like the control system, the user interface, how the player learns to play the game, and the process of keeping them coming back to a game time and time again. All areas of a design that are often overlooked in the rush to present the big sweeps of creativity such as storylines, character biogs, interesting vehicles and weapons. Design is not just about making stuff up.

While I was beavering away developing the games design, the other members of the team were busy putting together what will be Bob's first official prototype. At times this seemed like we were taking a step backwards in our development – going from the polished and very pretty demos we had developed in order to snare a publisher to something that looked, at least superficially, a lot less impressive. However it's what's going on underneath the hood which counts and at the end of the day a flashy demo is nothing more than that – pretty graphics showing off a core game engine with a rudimentary veneer of gameplay strapped on with the code equivalent of several rolls of gaffer tape.

Bob's new demo, although no beauty queen, has had its gaffer tape replaced with nice clean welding, and given us a foundation where we are confident that the code is not now hiding any nasty surprises for the future. I think Bob's going to be cool, and even with over a year of development left, it is already shaping into a classy game.

This is our last development diary, and I'm glad it's got a happy ending. There have been many times over the past 14 months where it seemed like we had made a big mistake, and times when we completely lost faith in the games industry. But bollocks to all that now, because we're still here, and still independent.

To those of you stuck in the realms of the wage slave dreaming of setting up your own company I say do it. Don't expect it to be easy, or a road to riches overnight, but it's a damn site more interesting existence.

Lastly, on behalf of everybody here at Brain In A Jar, I would like to thank **Edge** for the opportunity to bring you this diary, and I hope that at least some of you have enjoyed reading it.

Nigel Kershaw is a designer at Brain In A Jar

Edge's most wanted

Super Mario World 2

One of the most fondly remembered games of all time is set to enchant a new generation. Of course, it won't stop the old generation enjoying it just one more time.



(GBA) Nintendo

Colin McRae Rally 3

Early footage of Codemasters' next rally title sees the focus shift from the cars to the man himself – you now play as Colin, as though part of the Ford WRC team.



(PS2, Xbox) Codemasters

Neverwinter Nights

The online scripting opportunities of *Neverwinter Nights* promise much and may even persuade old-skool DMs to give up their bags of dice and figurines.



(PC) TBA

Unreal Championship

Epic have a tall order trying to best *Halo* in the multiplayer stakes, but vehicle combat, supercharged weapons and stunning visuals certainly augur well.



(Xbox) Infogrames

Backward looking

Is nostalgia really a licence to print money?

I'll be back. And true to form – 10 years since Bally Midway released *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* in the arcades – James Cameron's cyborg franchise returns to the videogame arena, yet again. A cause for celebration? Or just another cynical film licence? It's easy to scoff at the poor track record film licences have had over the years, but this is different. It marks a new age in which publishers are happy to buy up crusty old property to thrust upon an (un)suspecting audience.

Top Gun, *Spider-Man*, *Dukes Of Hazzard*, *ET*, *Thunderbirds*, *Robocop*, *Rocky*. The quest to gobble up '70s and '80s film and TV licences seems unquenchable. **Edge** awaits the day an 'A-Team' game is announced, complete with a build-a-submarine-out-of-Tupperware minigame. '80s nostalgia; 30-something demographic; a massmarket acceptance of videogames? **Edge** smells a rat. Are publishers trying to build a new business model around a growing fad?

To date, such conversions have hardly set the gaming firmament alight. *Dukes Of Hazzard*, in particular, was a hog with fleas, reeking of rushed development and shoddy workmanship. Resurrecting past glories often results in bitter disappointment. This was brought starkly into focus when Catherine Bach (aka Daisy Duke) returned 20 years later to reminisce about her days with Bo and Luke on 'I Love 1979'. 'Dukes Of Haggard' might have been closer to the truth.

But there is some hope. This month's two retro franchises are looking more promising. The Paradigm team working on *Terminator: Dawn Of Fate* has a good track record, having developed the excellent *PilotWings 64*, whereas Treyarch is refining its popular *Spider-Man* franchise for next-generation sensibilities. Surely one of the only advantages of a retro licence is that it doesn't have to be rushed out to coincide with a film's release. But the licensing game has always presented a moving target. While these properties – on the surface – are established enough to let the games stand alone, the marketing men are naturally going to want the games to harmonise with film releases. In these cases: *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* and *Spider-Man: The Movie*.

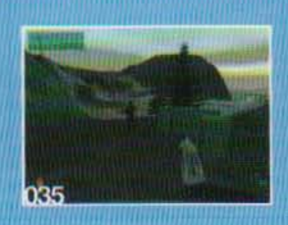
Publishers: please stop before it all goes too far. If the rush to exploit nostalgia reaches the saturation point we've suffered on TV then we may as well go back to hardcore retrogaming. If the trend continues we can look forward to the *I Love Metal Gear Solid* re-release. No doubt with cutscene commentary by Stuart Maconie. Not a pleasant thought.











Terminator: Dawn of Fate

New shots of Paradigm's movie-inspired thirdperson shooter show that some film licences absolutely will not stop – ever…









These shots are all taken from the PS2 version, but the game is currently awaiting concept approval from both Sony and Microsoft, so an Xbox version should be announced any day

Terminator: Dawn of Fate is the new thirdperson action title based upon James Cameron's *Terminator* films. Set in the futuristic battleground of the year 2029, the game functions as a prequel to the films series, chronicling humanity's rage against the machines right up until Arnold Schwarzenegger's T-800 is sent back in time, marking the beginning of the first film.

"*Dawn of Fate* looks to combine the graphical quality and action of *Devil May Cry* with *Red Faction*-style destructible environments"

The first thing you'll notice upon seeing *Terminator: Dawn of Fate* in action is the way the game has recreated and even amplified the films' relentless pacing. It pummels the player with one threat after another, and feels as much like a Eugene Jarvis-designed arcade blast-a-thon as it does a modern action adventure. Brand manager **Scott McCarthy** does promise mission parameters slightly more sophisticated than "run to a point, shoot the bad guy, run some more, shoot the bad guy." But, true to form, the game's legion of Terminators absolutely will not stop until their targets are dead. McCarthy reinforces this impression when he says, "Most action titles' gameplay model could be summarised as: action, then relief, action, then relief. We never hired a 'relief' guy."

To help players defend themselves against the onslaught of enemies, the team has adopted a fluid combat system that begins with a basic, *Devil May Cry*-style control scheme, adds a *Zelda*-esque target lock-on system, and makes the camera smarter and smoother, enabling players to more easily track enemies in 3D space.

Combat itself is mostly a guns-and-ammo affair (with around 20 different weapons), although each character also has kicking and rushing attacks that can knock down some enemies, enabling players to steal their opponents' weapons or just make a run for it.

Whether running or standing firm, players need to pay attention to the often interactive, destructible environment. For example, shooting a fuel tank causes it to explode, taking nearby enemies with it, and C4 can be used to collapse passageways, thus deterring pursuers. There are also stationary gun turrets that the player can commandeer to dole out some serious damage. This environmental depth is complemented by numerous NPCs who populate the war zone, from soldiers locked in battle with the machines to civilians who recoil, quaking in fear. Be careful to pay them heed, as each NPC's behaviour is influenced by your own. For instance, if you strive to preserve civilian lives, those civilians are more likely to offer you medical help or extra ammunition.

There are three different characters available to the player. The shots in this preview show Kyle Reese, the jack-of-all-trades soldier from the first film. The second character is Catherine Luna (read: Solid

Format: **PlayStation2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Paradigm Entertainment**
Origin: **US**
Release: **June 2002 (US), Q4 2002 (UK)**

Previously in **E**103

The view switches into firstperson when you commandeer a turreted gatling gun

Snake), a stealth operative who favours an EMP baton and performs missions of infiltration. McCarthy deflected our questions about the third character, enticingly offering, "All I can tell you is that the final character will be used when you need to bring in some major firepower. Is he human? Machine? Both? We'll see."

Combating these heroes is a host of enemies created specifically for the game. There are nearly 20 different types in all, including early model T-400 and T-500 Terminators, all-terrain H/K Spider Tanks, and countless H/K aircraft. While most are obviously new, the classic Model 101 Terminator – a T-800 with flesh, also called an Infiltrator – also makes an appearance.

Terminator: Dawn of Fate looks to combine the graphical quality and action of *Devil May Cry* with *Red Faction*-style destructible environments, meaningful story elements, and a killer licence. And it's certainly about time that someone did gaming justice to Cameron's sci-fi vision.



Drop-kicking a Terminator robot doesn't do any damage, but can halt its relentless assault long enough for you to make a break for it







Spider-Man: The Movie

Format: **PlayStation2, Xbox, GameCube, PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Treyarch**
Origin: **US**
Release: **May 2002 (US)**

Doing whatever a spider can is much more achievable when you have the power of next-generation consoles behind you



Despite their amazing powers, superheroes have had almost tragically bad luck in videogames. That said, Activision's *Spider-Man* games are an exception to the rule, perfectly capturing the essence of everyone's favourite web-slinging wall-crawler. Thus, with the series' third entry, developer Treyarch has chosen to enhance the spider-like sensations rather than reinvent them.

The most notable (and fundamental) of these improvements is Spidey's expanded ability to web-sling around the environment. Now he can bank left or right, climb or descend, redirect on the fly, and even dash while swinging. This increased mobility enables a new, decidedly above-ground combat dynamic. "We felt compelled to give the player levels with fully fleshed-out aerial combat," reveals senior producer **Gregory John**. "Even at this early point in development, it's an incredible rush to battle the Green Goblin through and above the rooftops of the city." Additional enemies will include The Vulture, The Shocker, and the common criminal who kills Peter Parker's Uncle Ben.

Spidey's entire arsenal of web-based weaponry is scheduled to return, complete with as-yet-unrevealed enhancements. And although John promises increased mission variety, he insists that "the best strategies will always involve using Spider-Man's specific set of skills."

Spider-Man's move to next-generation platforms has enabled many graphical improvements, including a 60fps frame-rate and higher polygon counts for both the characters and the environments. Even Spidey's mirrored eye-lenses will be reproduced, thanks to reflection mapping. All told, Treyarch's ideas should give a fresh feel to this already solid franchise. Now, if only everyone in the **Edge** office felt as confident about the movie itself...







Spider-Man looks to have greatly benefited from the move to next-gen consoles. Not only is he more finely detailed and animated, but the environments are much more accomplished



Many of Spider-Man's battles now take place in mid-air, thanks to a new movement system

Prisoner Of War

Format: **PC, PlayStation2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Wide Games**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q2 2002**

Previously in **E**96

Fewer controllable characters and a 50 per cent reduction in playing environments. But has POW lost any of its initial appeal as a result?

At a recent Codefest 2001 event in London organised by the Warwickshire-based developer to showcase its forthcoming wares, *Prisoner Of War* was introduced as a title representing a move away from the heavily equipped nature of the current generation of game characters, in an attempt to force you to rely on intelligence rather than resources.

Edge thought it felt a lot like the old 8bit Spectrum title *Skool Daze*. Which, if *POW* manages to equal the sense of tension felt in Microsphere's fondly remembered title, can only be a good thing.

Not so good is the revelation that you no longer play as four Allied officers as originally announced, and that the number of camps has been halved to include just Stalag Luft III and Colditz Castle. Perhaps Codemasters is planning a series of updates similar to the way the company has handled its excellent *Operation Flashpoint* franchise or maybe the feature cutting is the result of an attempt to ensure the game is ready for the (already once) revised release date.

Regardless, you're now US airman Captain Lewis Stone. After your mission goes wrong, you and your co-pilot become guests of the German military. As you'd expect, a POW camp – particularly a German POW camp – is subject to rules and routine, all of which are explained to you by your co-pilot who helpfully acts as your tutor during the initial stages of the game. You meet the local escape committee whom, in an interesting development, your actions affect. So rather than working out some flawless, selfish escape plan, you're actually set objectives to meet by your fellow inmates. For instance, one such task includes the sabotage of a secret weapon being developed within the prison itself.

The essence of the game then becomes to engage in illegitimate conduct without alerting the attention of the many guards around. This requires scrutiny of the environment and the behaviour of your captors in order to reveal potential windows of opportunity. While you cannot die, being discovered in an area you shouldn't be in immediately strips your character of the items he's carrying (which include, amongst others, a telescope, crowbar, lockpick and catapult – useful for taking out searchlights) and sends you back to the last save point, which occurs every time you fall asleep at night.

The very nature of the game demands a lengthier presentation than the 30 minutes **Edge** spent in *Prisoner Of War*'s company but first impressions are very good. If Codemasters ensures that the all-important sense of tension is maintained throughout the proceedings then it should have little to worry about.









Play is said to reflect the personality of the user. But while German guards are surprisingly civil in a POW camp, pushing them remains unadvisable



Stalag Luft III's open approach (above) is very much the opposite of the interior environments you face in the 'escape-proof' Colditz Castle







You can engage in dynamic conversation with fellow prisoners in order to find out what your next 'mission' is. In return, the game responds dynamically to your actions. And yes, you can time skip

Dual Hearts

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **February 2002 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

With domestic PS2 sales increasing due to a recent price cut, SCEI grows increasingly confident as conveniently demonstrated by the company's brave new action RPG





A soft focus filter effect is utilised around the edges of the screen in order to depict the game's 40-odd dream sequences you can play through

Baku, a creature from the land of dreams, needs help. Predictably, it needs *your* help. The keys allowing access to a sacred locale require collecting but they are currently hidden within the dreams of 15 individuals and two animals – the inhabitants populating the island of Sonno.

You need to search the island to find them and then wait for them to fall asleep before your adventure begins. The game includes over 40 variations of dream themes and you only get to experience a selection with each play – it's up to you to maximise your encounters with Sonno's populace in order to access different 'stages'. Baku is on hand to help you out, be it by informing you of your health status, offering speedy transport on land, carriage across water, even airborne travel, or simply fighting valiantly alongside you. The latter option comes in particularly handy when facing one of the 11 end-of-level bosses.

Each of your hands holds a weapon (sword, spear, bow, etc) and by pressing the buttons that control your arms (square and circle) you effect a variety of menacing combos and special moves. Naturally, you also get to utilise a selection of items.

More information on *Dual Hearts* as and when.



Another intriguing title to emerge from SCEI – although currently available information doesn't adequately convey whether this is a title that is aimed at the younger end of the market or not

Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Rainbow Studios**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q1 2002 (US) TBA (UK)**

As the extreme sports score-chasers move into the next generation, competition in the BMX arena begins to heat up





Rainbow is bringing the experience gained in the production of *ATV Off-Road Fury* to *Mat Hoffman*, with expansive detailed, outdoor environments



***Hoffman* is undeniably similar to *Mirra*. But being second to market, *Hoffman* can learn from *Mirra*'s mistakes and strengths – for example, tricks can now be modified on the fly**

When the first *Mat Hoffman* title shipped last May, it was clearly relying too heavily on the cachet established by *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. The game sold respectably, but it lacked the quality and polish of the earlier marquee title. In the move to PS2, Activision assigned new developer Rainbow the task of riding the series out of the Hawk's shadow.

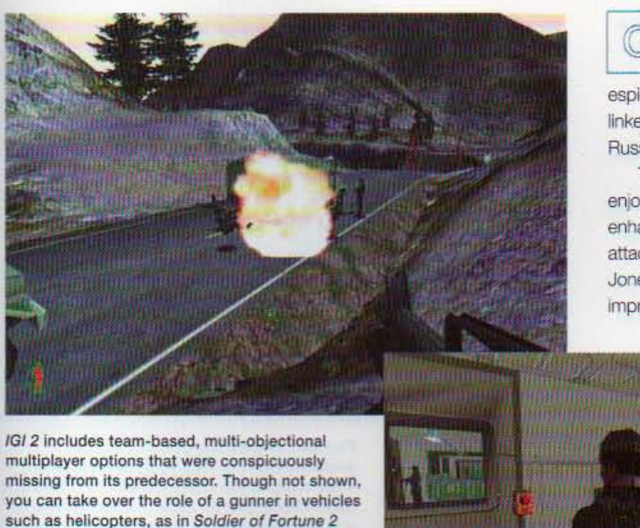
Rainbow's first task was to build a robust new engine capable of generating levels comparable in scale to those in Acclaim's *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2*. It then incorporated a whole range of new stunt features. "We've added the wall ride, sprocket grind, flatland tricks, and numerous double-tap tricks that are not specials," explains producer **Brian Bright**. Additionally, the game boasts a *Mirra*-style 'Trick Morpher' system, with which tricks can be altered during execution, yielding thousands of possible permutations. The usual 'more is better' enhancements also apply, as there are now 11 riders, eight singleplayer levels, and additional twoplayer levels.

It's uncertain whether these adjustments will prove sufficient to give *MHPB2* command of the BMX genre. *Mirra 2* is an accomplished competitor, and *MHPB2* lacks online play and a Create-A-Player mode, both of which would provide additional depth.

IGI 2: Covert Strike

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Innerloop Studios**
Origin: **Norway**
Release: **Q2 2002**

In an uncommon move, a change of publisher sees ex-SAS, freelance covert operative David Jones return in promised improved sequel form



IGI 2 includes team-based, multi-objectional multiplayer options that were conspicuously missing from its predecessor. Though not shown, you can take over the role of a gunner in vehicles such as helicopters, as in *Soldier of Fortune 2*

Codemasters, not Eidos, is bringing you *IGI 2*. The game takes place soon after the events in *Project IGI* – the Cold War finished, the world's states focus their attention on industrial espionage. Expect to put your mouse and keyboard skills through three linked campaigns offering 20 missions in total and taking place across Russia, Libya and China.

The game promises to repair the weaknesses of its reasonably enjoyable predecessor. For instance, the AI has been substantially enhanced so that the enemy now engages in better squad-based attacks. For example, they now investigate the noise that results from Jones' ability to throw stones around the place. The animation has improved, too – the result of increased skeletal structure – and, given the game's penchant for authenticity, guards no longer respawn when killed.

The significant size of the levels in the first game proved problematic when forced to restart a mission after being gunned down. Therefore, although the environments in the sequel are larger still, the developer has included a type of quicksave option (it's time-based to prevent overusage) to combat this problem.

IGI 2: Covert Strike features more of the same, then, only better. Possibly.





As you'd expect gun turrets can be taken over, although long-distance shots are better suited to sniper rifles. New weapons include a minigun

Kessen II

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Koei**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **January 2002**

Koei invigorates its PlayStation2 historical strategy sim with a bombastic bit of Chinese myth





Special moves and zoomed-in action acquire a greater importance in the sequel to the title's more historically authentic predecessor, *Kessen*



It's easy to see how Japanese publisher Koei has managed to carve out a successful niche as a historical strategy specialist when *Kessen II* is considered alongside the original *Kessen* and the first three chapters in the *Dynasty Warriors* series

Thanks to a new setting and an attempt to make play more accessible, the sequel to Koei's historical strategy title has undergone a slight shift in tone compared to the PlayStation2 original. Although there's a reduced emphasis on the finer details of troop positioning and pre-battle strategising, the broad brush tactical interplay is maintained, and there's increased scope for zooming in on the action and taking control of your army's officers in a manner akin to *Dynasty Warriors*.

Whereas the first title recreated real-life events from the early 17th Century with a reasonable degree of authenticity, *Kessen II* moves the action to the mythic era of the Romance of Three Kingdoms, some 1500 years earlier. Consequently, special moves and *Final Fantasy*-like spell effects assume greater significance throughout the course of battle, but essentially the core features of the original are maintained and expanded upon. Which means more FMV (unfortunately with poorly localised lip-synching), and more engagingly hyperactive mêlée management. This time around the action takes place across a wider range of environments, which encompass ship-to-ship troop battles and castle sieges, and features five times the number of troops.

Jet Riders

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: TBA
Developer: Bits Studios
Origin: UK
Release: Q1 2002 (UK)

Racing games have taken a decidedly watery turn of late. And in case GBA owners were feeling left out, Bits Studios has the aqueous solution





There are 21 courses included in the game, split across three geographic locations and replete with suitably themed graphics

In the wake of the current crop of water-based racers – *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, *Bloodwake*, *Splashdown* and *Wave Rally* – it was inevitable that someone would provide a similar experience for the GBA. Cue *Jet Riders* from the ubiquitous Bits Studios, a top-down jetski racer in the vein of *Driven* on water.

Obviously, while the console-based titles are keen to draw attention to their realistic water visuals and physics, GBA developers aren't afforded such graphical luxuries. However, Bits is eager to point out that *Jet Riders* still features realistic water effects and wave animation with authentic jetski dynamics.

Like many Advance codeshops, Bits is taking gameplay back to its roots. "With *Jet Riders*, we wanted to combine 'old-school' playability with next-generation visuals," explains **Foo Katan**, MD and CEO of Bits Studios. Accordingly, the game boasts fast, eight-way, multi-layered scrolling, and the stunt escapades of the racers are portrayed using detailed, prerendered 3D sprites.

The simple racing concept should transfer well to GBA, and the addition of stunts will no doubt appeal to the *Tony Hawk's* fraternity.

Jet Riders should have hit final master by now, although a publisher has yet to be found prior to its 2002 release.



Players compete alongside five other jetskiers, either in Free Practice, or across three competition modes (Race, Time Trial and Stunt Challenge). An array of stunt apparatus is in evidence (ramps, gaps, crevice jumps, rails and grinds), and stuntwork is rewarded with points multipliers, enabling the player to indulge in extravagant score-chasing

The King Of Fighters EX – Neo Blood

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Sammy Corporation
Developer: Marvellous Entertainment Inc.
Origin: Japan
Release: March 2002 (USA) May 2002 (UK)

SNK might have been knocked out of the contest, but its spirit lives on in the shape of a pocket version of its most famous fighting property

Even with the sad demise of SNK, the fate of its long-awaited GBA beat 'em up, *The King Of Fighters*, was assured – it was always more a matter of which company would pick it up, rather than if. Subsequently, the publishing rights have been claimed by the Sammy Corporation for release early in 2002.

In terms of narrative, *Neo Blood* is set between the storylines of *KOF '97* and *KOF '99*, and so retains many of the familiar faces, while introducing a single new fighter. For the uninitiated, the *KOF* series introduced the concept of team play and strikers – CPU-controlled cohorts who can be called upon to quickly perform a few swift moves before exiting (the beat 'em up equivalent of a smart bomb).

The majority of characters have been lifted (literally, in terms of the sprite animations) from *KOF '99*, although Moe Habuna is totally new. This lithe teenager features a range of punch, flip-kick and hopping punch attacks, and her special attacks are occasionally accompanied by a burst of cherry blossom.

The incorporation of the coin-op voice samples, plus a link-cable mode for twoplayer action, should make *Neo Blood* a welcome addition to the GBA's line-up, and a suitable successor (and possible capstone) to the *King Of Fighters* dynasty.



The initial roster of 24 characters is split into six teams, consisting of three fighters plus one exclusive striker. However, a further four as-yet-unnamed strikers are unlockable, and can be allied to teams at the player's behest





Fans of the series might be disappointed to find *Neo Blood* little more than a remixed version of *KOF Evolution*, with just one new fighter

Herdy Gerdy

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Eidos Interactive**
Developer: **Core Design**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Spring 2002**

Previously in **E**96

Though the visuals may have been eclipsed by the resplendent Jak And Daxter, Core's Disney-esque adventure game has the novelty and charm to turn heads come 2002



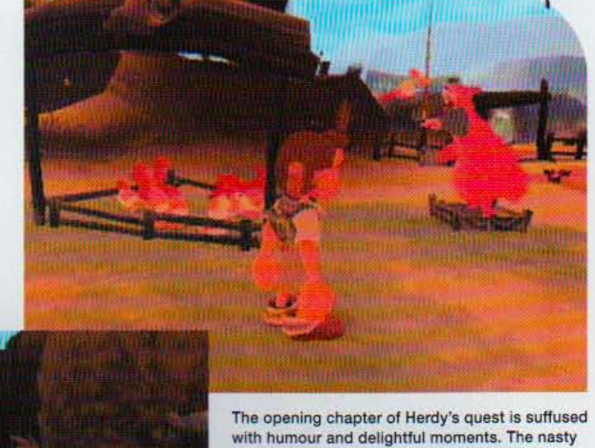


The structure of the game owes more to Rare's adventures than Nintendo's. It's a gentle learning curve with early minigames helping progress

Games slipping past the Christmas period can hurt any company, but on present evidence *Herdy Gerdy* looks good enough to thaw hearts when it's released in spring 2002. The only real competition, in terms of tone and content, is *Jak And Daxter*, but while the former is certainly more accomplished in the visual department, Core's title has many novelties to set it apart from the usual platform game.

As the title suggests, this is a game which uses herding as its main component. But since **Edge** last looked at the title (**E**96) the sophistication of the herding AI and the devices which can be employed to influence the many beasts of the world have improved a great deal. A flute, a herding stick and a hunting horn all cleverly help the hero to influence creatures with a great deal of imagination. Certainly, *Herdy Gerdy* must be one of the only games to give players the chance to wield a sheilelagh (a hammer which produces a temporary rainbow bridge).

Its an engaging package marred somewhat by loose controls and a slightly clumsy camera. But, as always, these problems can be remedied before final release. *Herdy Gerdy* is one of the more encouraging prospects for the usually fallow post-winter period.



The opening chapter of Herdy's quest is suffused with humour and delightful moments. The nasty pink Gromps (above) can be caught in traps. But should they be ensnared too close to the Doops, then a fishing rod is used to capture their prey

Timesplitters2

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Free Radical Design**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Mid-2002**

Previously in **E**99, **E**102

FRD's founding members venture into a London hotel to show off their unfinished creation to the press. **Edge** joins them to see what has evolved since last seeing the game in August





The Nôtre Dame (top and far right) and Gangster (above) levels – you can play pool by shooting at the balls. Try not to damage the baize, though



As in the first game, *TS2*'s environments are a little barren in order to help the game's frenetic (and technically constant) pace – "speed over graphical niceties", as the developer put it. Online play is still a possibility, just not a likely one

Forgive the list-like approach, but there's plenty to get through and not much space to do it in. Graphically, there's improved texture variety, the explosions are certainly more substantial, the number of death animations continues to increase while the in-game movement of the 80-odd characters really impresses. And it's pleasing to see plenty of comedic touches, too – a nice change from the overly serious nature of some FPS offerings.

Newly revealed levels include a Nôtre Dame-inspired entry and a 1920s Chicago gangster setting to add to the other seven 'episodes' – all of them distinct yet linked together by the *TimeSplitters* theme. More environments are included for multiplayer (although there's the obvious MapMaker function) and thought is currently being given to whether power-ups should be included in this mode.

The team expects the selected difficulty level to alter the objectives you're given (the co-op option adds mode-specific tasks) and while all of the iLink options remain (see **E**102), one cable will now also connect two consoles for an eightplayer deathmatch without the need for a hub set up.

Expectedly, the team is refraining from disclosing the *really* good ideas – one of the FRD reps confirmed as much after the presentation. Time will (eventually) tell.





Eve Online

Beneath the glow of the Northern Lights and far from any distractions, an Icelandic developer has been working on an Elite-inspired sci-fi epic. Edge headed north to discover more about CCP and its penchant for syrup

When you're at the hard-man's edge of the Viking colonies, the unexpected is expected. Just not this. "Come – you've got to see how we create worlds," speaks our genial host in ever-perfect English, leading us into the kitchen.

Edge is presented with the following sight: a slightly murky fishtank rests by the window, looking over sunny Reykjavik. Above it is affixed an expensive digital camera. Into this voluminous container, two of the team's artists are scooping foodstuffs: a layer of milk, Pollock-styled splatters of jam, yoghurt, long circles of golden syrup. They are being manipulated by a lengthy twig. When a suitably organic array is formed, a photo is taken. This image is then taken into Photoshop, manipulated and coloured appropriately, and imported into the engine. And a beautiful, completely-random organic gas-sphere is formed. Proving again that 'Blue Peter'-level tech beats the best rendering Hollywood can offer.

Edge is impressed. And, looking at the golden syrup jar, more than a bit peckish. CCP is currently approaching the first Beta-testing of its massively multiplayer online epic space game *Eve: The Second Genesis* and busily thinking outside the box. Just not always outside its cereal boxes.

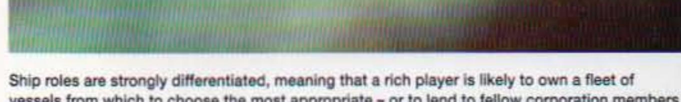
You really wouldn't expect less from a team formed and staffed in Iceland – a country where there's a massive bandwidth penetration and where, according to some surveys, 80 per cent still believe in the existence of elves. CCP is the speartip of the Icelandic gaming industry. Moreover, it's the entire spear, being the only major developer of note in the isle. This has several advantages in the process, "Since the population is small, you know anyone who knows anything about something," explains chief technology officer **Hilmar Petursson**, grinning. "And it's very easy to keep them together, as there are no distractions from other games companies."

The aim of an Elite-influenced game in which galaxies of space pirates may interact in a freeform fashion has long been a holy grail for videogamers

While the aim of an *Elite*-influenced game in which galaxies of space pirates may interact in a freeform fashion has long been a holy grail for

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **CCP**
Developer: **In-house**
Release: **2002**
Origin: **Iceland**





Ship roles are strongly differentiated, meaning that a rich player is likely to own a fleet of vessels from which to choose the most appropriate – or to lend to fellow corporation members

videogamers, and bandied around in conversation, *Eve*'s roots lie back in 1995. Then, according to lead designer, **Dr Kjartan Pierre Emilsson**, the idea for *Eve* was "simply doing some kind of 3D *Elite* with better graphics and multiplayer". This eureka was prior to the formation of CCP, when the core of the team splintered from an Icelandic Internet-boom company. The script and form were hammered out in 1997, with the rest of CCP slowly forming around this template. *Elite* for the next generation – or at least in theme. Having returned to the '80s wireframe motherload, Kjartan acknowledges how times have changed, "I realised by visiting nostalgic things like that it reduces them. It's better to keep it good like it is in the memory, but try to recreate the same feeling today."

However, while *Elite* is the formative cause, it's far from the only influence. When asked about the early development of *Eve*, art director **Reynir Hardarson** elaborates at length on the influence of his time spent on *Ultima Online* and its effect on coalescing what they wished to create. Compared to latecomers to the online world, *Ultima* is, according to Reynir, a harsh place. Whereas in *EverQuest*, it's impossible to be attacked by a fellow player unless you choose to have a player-killer flag on, in *Ultima*, everyone's vulnerable. This lead to a genuine demonisation of the players who would prey on other players. They were – make no doubt about this – hated.

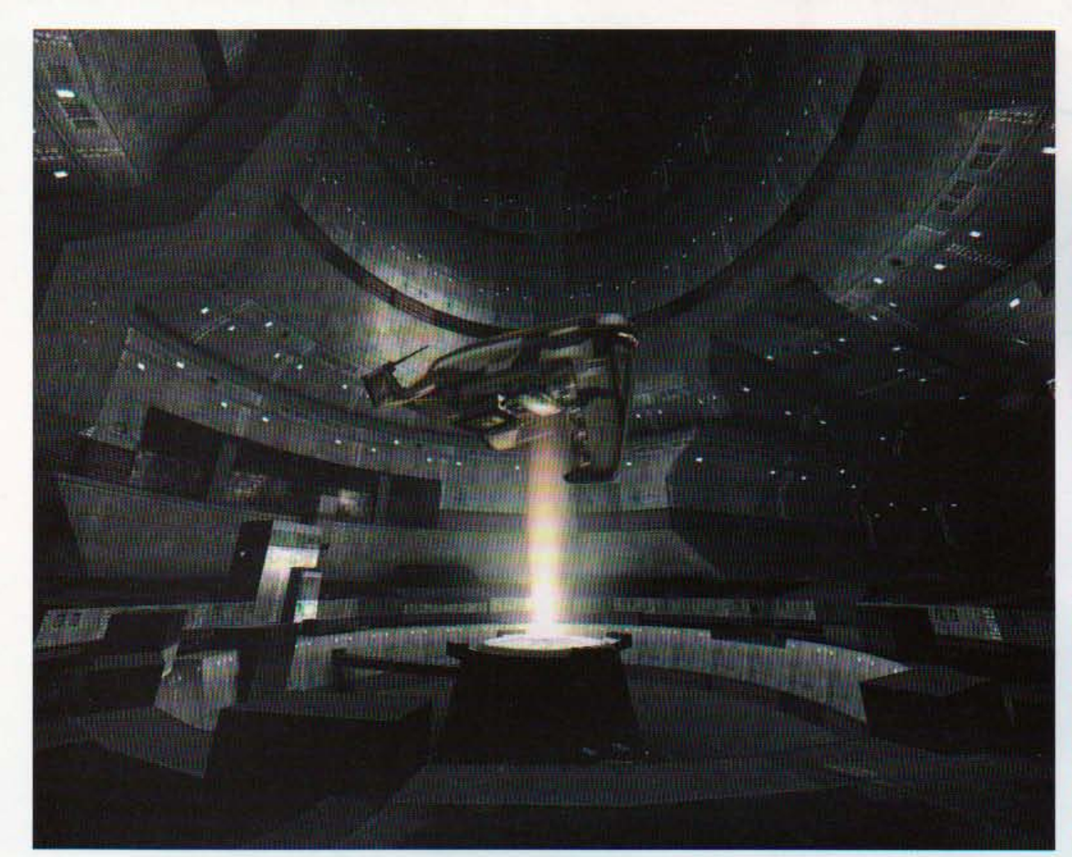
Reynir describes how the majority of the anti-social players, who rather than attempting to roleplay in cod-fantasy 'thees' and 'thous', would speak in the ever-popular string of Net shorthands and l33t-speak. Players who wished to live in peace argued that they were spoiling the fun for everyone, and started to wipe them out. However, argues Reynir, this says something far more important about the possibilities of a freeform closed system in gaming. "The meta-game which came out of that was the struggle between good and evil. You had the players who spoke hacker-speech as the bad guys and the roleplayers as the nice guys who spoke elvish. This tremendously expanded the depth of the game, as you weren't fighting a computer-controlled artificial evil, but were fighting something you really, really hated. And you got an incredible kick out of killing the people who were spoiling the game for everyone."

It's a convincing argument. You can only hate the Evil Bydo empire so much – it's far easier to loathe another human being who is trying to make your life hell. Reynir points out that this modern foible for online roleplaying games to be cooperative is an anomaly. "All the multiplayer games are about playing against an opponent – and if you take





Sigurdur Arnljotsson
CEO
Reynir Hardarson
art director
Hilmar V. Petursson
lead programmer
Dr Kjartan Pierre Emilsson
lead designer
Fridrik Haraldsson
art producer
Sigurdur Olafsson
marketing manager



The dark-fantasy hard-edged sci-fi European epic influence to *Eve* is easy to note, far away from 'Star Trek' cleanness. In space, no one can hear you scream about how good the environment mapping is



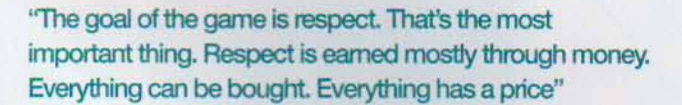


that away from a massively multiplayer game, what have you left?" This turned *Eve*'s vision into a player-versus-player warfare on a galactic level for the highest stakes. Conflict would, primarily, come from the players and so, provoke a truly immersive universe.

"You can never enforce roleplaying, but you will find yourself doing so in *Eve*, because the setting is a part of the game – not just a mood," says Reynir. "You're involved, through the missions." In other words, you're defined by your actions in the system, not the ephemera that surrounds you.

So *Eve* has created a deeply compelling world full of factions which interact with the player through a contact and mission system. At the start of the game, you choose between which of the 15 major organisations you're aligned to, which provides you with a contact who'll offer suitable tasks. While, at a low level, this involves minimal interaction or competition with other players, allowing people to dabble in the 50,000 solar-body star galaxy that makes up *Eve*'s playfield, swiftly you find your interests clashing with others, both computer-controlled and human.

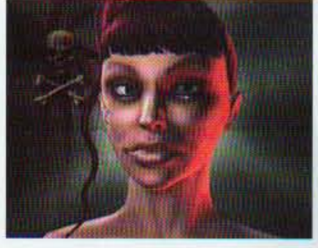
After succeeding on a number of missions, you're provided with a new contact higher up the organisation – and the jobs you choose define which contact you reach. Naturally, raising your popularity with one organisation will lead to lowering it with their opponents, and the whole mission-system can be side-stepped by performing critical actions. For example, if you find a powerful pirate and annihilate him from the spacelanes, expect *Eve*'s equivalent of Interpol to contact you. As a system, it recalls *Grand Theft Auto* – another useful reference point when thinking about the similarly dark *Eve*.



"The goal of the game is respect. That's the most important thing. Respect is earned mostly through money. Everything can be bought. Everything has a price"

And equally, this ties into the facet of reputation. Kjartan stresses, "The goal of the game is respect. That's the most important thing. Respect is earned mostly through money. Everything can be bought. Everything has a price." To say the least, *Eve* has a brutally capitalistic edge. While the missions provide a structure for slow investigation into the world, the actual player's experience of play in the world manifests in either low, medium or high-scale interactions. The low-scale play includes events such as space-combat and mining, and involves direct conflict with one another. Medium scale events occur when a player has amassed sufficient funds to purchase real-estate such as factories or space-stations, or feels capable of fulfilling contracts. Rather than having an infinite economy, *Eve* relies on player actions to create all the items in the world. Resources must be gathered from planets, transferred to factories and constructed into the useful tools for sale – and people can make a profitable niche on any one of these levels.

Finally, when basic trading is not enough, there is the high-scale battle between corporations, controlling trade-routes and owning solar systems, each consisting of many individuals who've chosen to cooperate. Due to the gameworld being constructed in a manner akin to a *Risk* board – with



Players can define the attributes of their features – including such items as tattoos – to create a unique in-game presence



jumpgates in each system leading to a small number of others – it's possible to secure areas, and secure your domain.

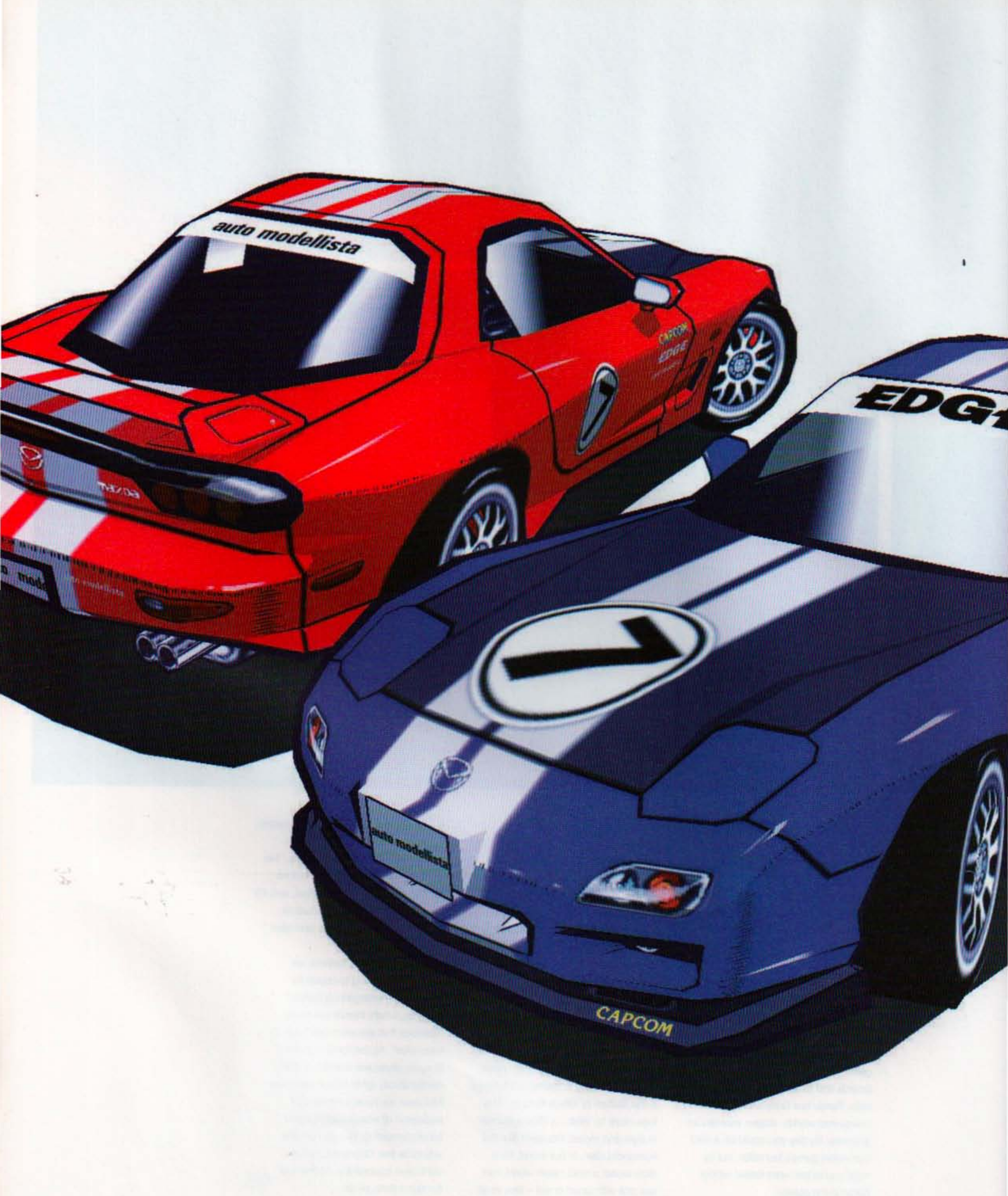
Three things about the corporations strike **Edge** as fascinating. Firstly, this large-scale and game-defining structure is created in-game through the implementation of very simple systems. A secure payment system and a secure voting system for corporations allow payment for any interaction or service the player can consider to offer.

Secondly, most interaction between corporations will happen outside the game – through e-mail, message boards and late night threatening phone calls. Rarely has Sony's 'I have conquered worlds' slogan seemed so apposite. By day you could be a mild mannered games journalist, but by night you're the most feared robber baron in the galaxy.

And, thirdly, the corporations already exist and are playing the meta-game of political intrigue without the *Eve* galaxy at all, proto-Microsofts in waiting. As Kjartan notes, the central question *Eve* asks is simple, "Can you move the genre of space-simulation from being just combat to this very large-scale kind of gaming?"

And large-scale is *Eve* all over. While games are all about creating coherent worlds that exist in and of their own rules, Reynir, a founder member of CCP, is sure of the sort of the world they wish to create. "What we found lacking in the big sci-fi things, is the realism of 'Blade Runner'. We look more to 'Alien' or 'Blade Runner' in style and mood. We don't like the humanoid alien. In our world, it's a dark world; a cold, harsh world. Not just one with good or evil – they're all sort of dark and decadent. We wanted to make it a believable world with stories and politics and no aliens." He grins, "Well – alien lifeforms, but no 'Star Trek'. You go into combat, and it's not going to be Wagner, industrial techno or really hard drum and bass." So dark, then.

As **Edge** leaves Iceland, we leave CCP working to create its fetishistically charged capitalistic universe, where friends just mean "enemies that are more profitable to keep alive". As the lights of Aurora Borealis disappear behind us and the harsh city lights of Europe come into view, we have a moment of realisation of what a selfish world full of competing, greedy humans would be like. Of course, in *Eve*, we'll have spaceships. To the final frontier: infinite profit.


auto modellista
CAPCOM
EDGE
auto modellista
CAPCOM

Auto Modellista

Better known for its beat 'em ups, Capcom shook up the last Tokyo Game Show with Auto Modellista. Edge looks at its cel-shaded exterior before examining the communication and customisation under the bonnet

Capcom might be well known for its 2D beat 'em up properties, and more recently, for the creation of the survival horror genre, but as a developer and publisher, it doesn't exactly stand shoulder to shoulder with the giants of the motorsports racing genre. Well, not yet anyway.

Tucked away, almost surreptitiously, on the company's stand at the last Tokyo Game Show, the cel-shaded livery of *Auto Modellista* might suggest that things are about to change. While the TGS showreel provided ample demonstration of the title's aesthetic accomplishments, it gave little away about finer gameplay detail. So **Edge** was reassured to find that the development team hopes to distinguish its first automotive outing on console hardware with several innovative game mechanics – particularly in light of the number of developers willing to hijack the cel-shading bandwagon after the success of *Jet Set Radio*.

However, it's going to be a tall order, for a team that is more familiar with programming beat 'em ups, to ensure that *Auto Modellista*'s play mechanics match its obvious graphical finery. After all, only general producer, **Noritaka Funamizu** has any experience of the motorsports genre. "*Auto Modellista* is not actually our first racing game," he explains. "Ten years ago there was a title called *Slipstream*, a racing game featuring linked cabinets like Sega's. But we only made 150 units and they didn't sell very well (laughs). But I liked the game very much despite its fate.



Auto Modellista is designed to be the antithesis of the realistic simulations that dominate the motorsports market. Distinctive visuals are combined with arcade play mechanics





Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Release: **Spring 2002**
Origin: **Japan**

A combination of cel-shading techniques and ostensibly realistic lighting effects gives *Auto Modellista* a unique visual style





Capcom hopes that people will use the network chat feature to facilitate team competitions and do some showing off

Following this experience I thought racing titles were impossible to develop at Capcom." Nevertheless, despite the reluctance of his superiors at the company, Funamizu-san has always been keen to branch out. "I've had this desire to make a racing game for a long time. There have been many talks at Capcom about making an arcade racing game, but the cost of designing a cabinet was too much. It wasn't realistic for the company to spend so much, so I gave up the idea. However, when we decided to develop a console title featuring network play, the first idea I had was a racing game."

Vested interest

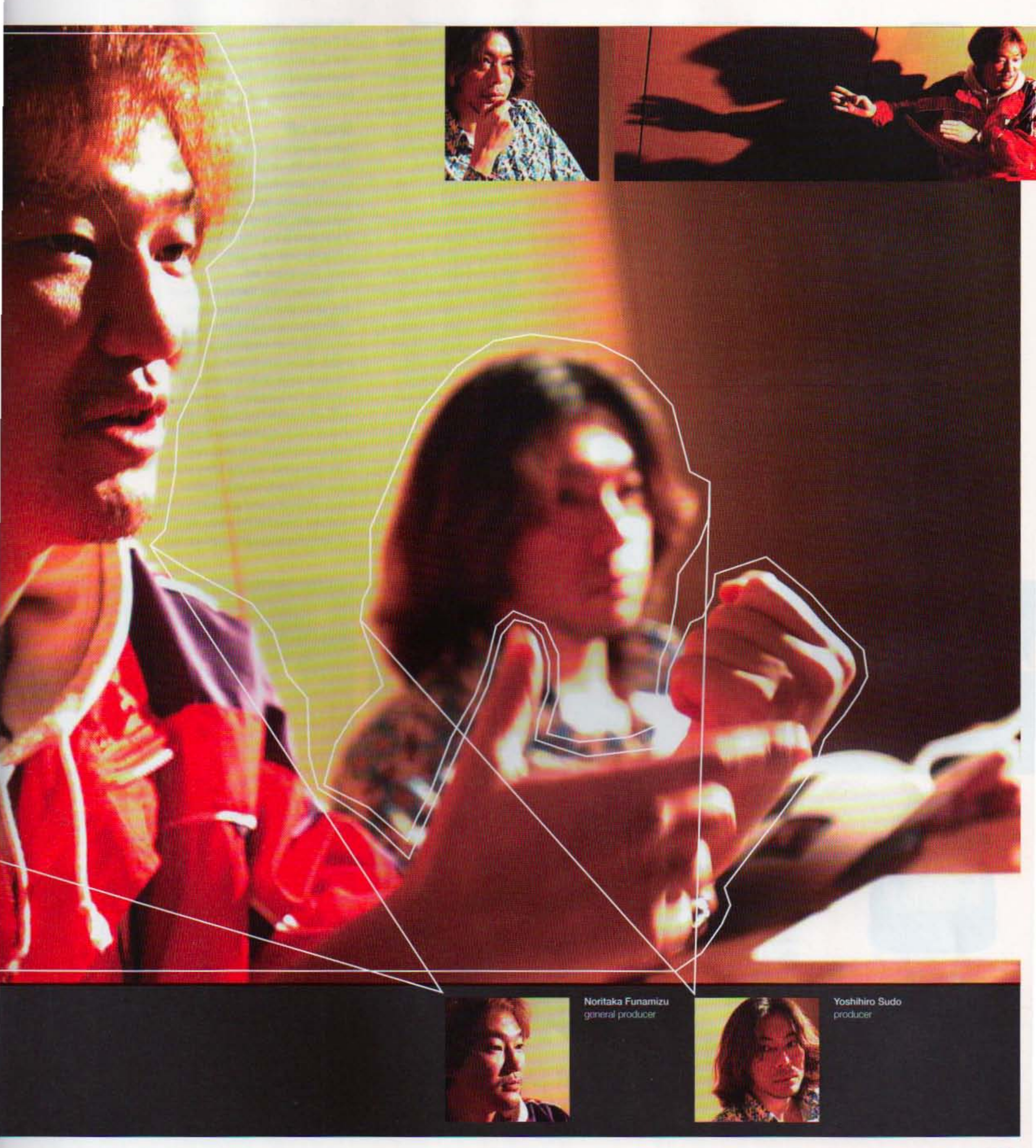
Although he hasn't had any firsthand experience developing driving games, producer, **Yoshihiro Sudo**, also has a vested interest in the genre. Like Funamizu-san, he joined Capcom at a time when the company was expanding rapidly. "Back at that time, Capcom had its own F-3000 team," he reveals. "In fact, I joined Capcom for that reason. I love cars. I race a little and have a licence. When I joined the company, I asked Capcom's racing team to see if they'd let me join the team. Just after they told me that I could, Capcom decided to stop the team because it wasn't profitable, turning to J-League instead."

While the team's most senior members have a passing acquaintance with the genre, none of the rest of the team does. Getting themselves and their team up to scratch over the course of the game's two years in development required substantial research. "We've had to study the subject very hard in order to develop the game," discloses Sudo-san. Funamizu-san elucidates: "We have been doing a lot of crazy things to learn about racing. We've been buying documentation, renting cars and driving them on circuits. We even bought a cheap car to crash. When I went to Europe, I witnessed many car game developers. I was very surprised by the level of realism." The team even extended its research to making sure that the game's title was appropriate. "We had a very long list of hundreds of titles. We even phoned Europe to test our choices."

Despite the specific inexperience of his team though, Funamizu-san is keen to stress the transferable skills acquired during the development of beat 'em ups. "Although we have focused on beat 'em ups for a long time, it doesn't mean we aren't capable of developing a racing game. In many respects, our experience has been very important in designing this game, with regard to animation and damage management."

Artistoon

Clearly, one of the advantages of the team's background is that it's brought an aesthetic freshness to a genre hitherto obsessed with scaling ever-greater heights of realism – an obsession which Funamizu-san laments. "I have the feeling that there isn't much originality in the racing genre right now. Particularly visually, I can't tell one title from another. None of the current titles give any new or fresh feelings." In the hope of inspiring fresh



Noritaka Funamizu
general producer

Yoshihiro Sudo
producer







feelings, his team has developed a cel-shading technique that he calls 'Artistoon'. "I also think that it grants more freedom if you design a game in an opposite style to one that's already very famous. Looking back to *Virtua Fighter*, it was almost the opposite of *Street Fighter*, and this had an impact on gamers. If you consider racing titles, *Gran Turismo 3* is the ultimate simulation, so we decided we needed to make a title that looked very 'game-looking' title." Although the Artistoon technique is indeed more 'game-looking', *Auto Modellista*'s cel-shaded visuals don't preclude a whole host of semi-realistic visual effects that also contribute to the game's singular appearance, such as lens flare, motion blur, and sophisticated lighting and weather effects.



But, as Funamizu-san himself admits, none of this will matter if the game doesn't play well: "If gameplay isn't any good, beautiful graphics won't be sufficient. Capcom is trying to review all of its projects to deliver a higher level of quality. This is the rule." To this end, *Auto Modellista* includes features that gamers have come to expect as standard, along with one or two that haven't been seen before.

The game consists of circuit-based racing, without civilian traffic. It's planned to include around ten circuits, with up to eight cars onscreen, though night racing stages may see this reduce to six due to technical constraints. A standard arcade mode sits alongside a championship mode and a twoplayer splitscreen versus mode, but more interestingly, it's also be joined by a network play mode – featuring team play – and a car edit mode.

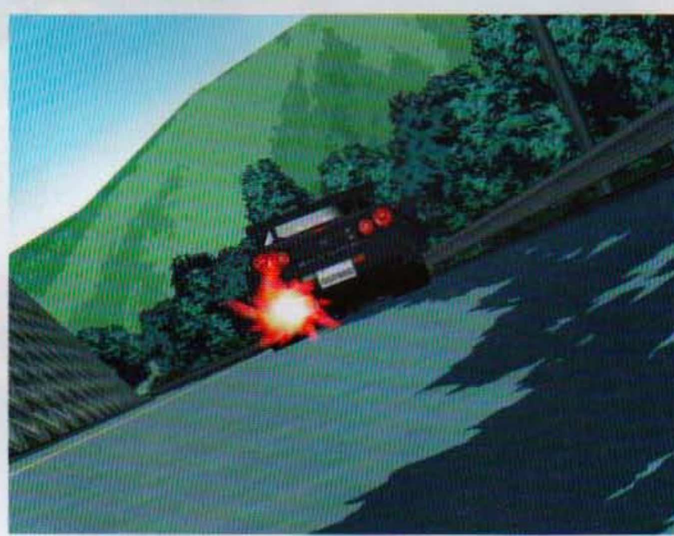
There's also a 'VJ' option, to allow players to edit and playback action replays. Sadly, the title won't include in-game damage. "Some manufacturers would have allowed us to include car damage," explains Sudo-san, "but others wouldn't, so we decided to cut this feature." Judging by the comments of *The Getaway*'s Sam Coates back at GDCE, it would appear that *Auto Modellista* isn't the only title to suffer because of prissy car manufacturers.

Show off

Better news concerns those areas in which the title departs from the norm, namely customisation and communication, as Sudo-san goes on to elaborate. "One of the major features of the game is that you are fully able to customise your car – parts, colours, logos, power-ups, etc.

"Another major feature is network play, which allows you to use your customised car against other players. We've designed everything so that people will be able to communicate with each other easily and show off their cars." In contrast to the meticulous approach required by *Gran Turismo* players, the *Auto Modellista* team aims to make this element of play much more accessible, with the effect of new parts immediately obvious, both in terms of handling and appearance. "For example," illustrates Funamizu-san, "if you add an aerodynamic part and feel





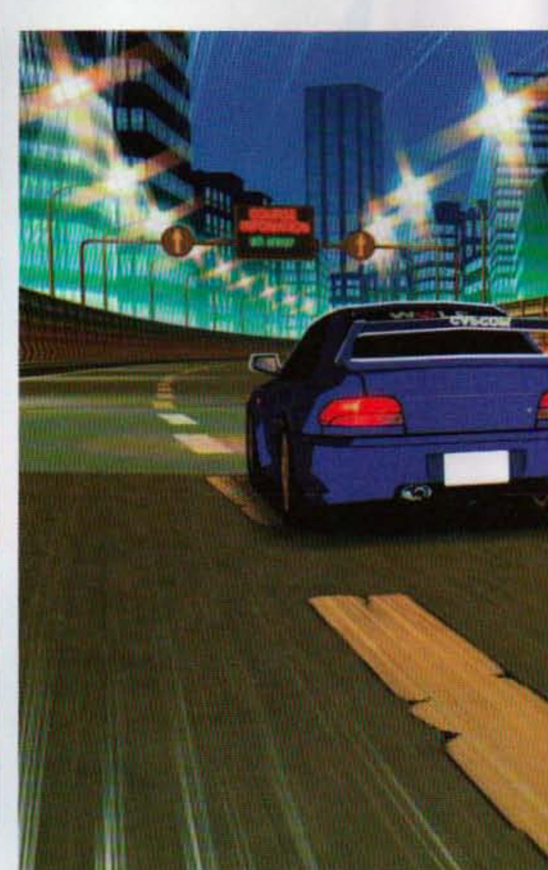
Yet again, Edge is forced to lament the intransigence of major car manufacturers, who refuse to countenance in-game damage







It looks magnificent in still pictures, but as Tokyo Game Show-goers can attest, it's even more stunning when rolling footage is shown

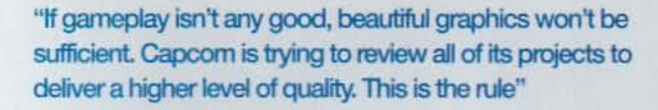


no real change, you wouldn't be very happy. We also want users to see any changes onscreen."

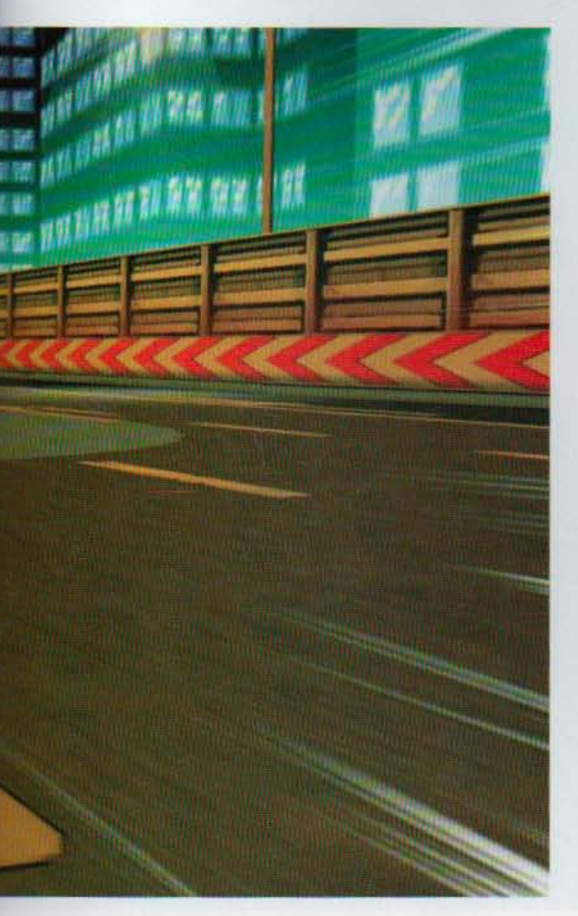
Although plenty of racing titles have included elements of customisation, *Auto Modellista* is likely to come into its own owing to the game's focus on networked community play. When players log onto the network the main racing screen is accompanied by a chat window, which allows users to chat about their cars and their settings.

With the game designed to be functional over narrowband, both Funamizu-san and Sudo-san each hope that a large community will be attracted by the opportunity to show off and trade information. "Up to now, racing games have only been about competitive racing," states Sudo-san, "but we feel that you should be able to have fun just watching other players racing." Funamizu-san quickly agrees: "Yes, I think this is important. You can buy the game, go online and have fun only watching races. So you can have fun racing solo at home, or you can exchange car data with other players and watch them compete – you could even specialise in designing cars and helping other players." Players can also set up team-based tournaments and competitions, using the chat function to agree on racing conditions, though the maximum team size has yet to be finalised.

Given the potential of network play to change the way motorsports titles are perceived, it's disappointing to find out that European gamers may not get a chance to experience this aspect of *Auto Modellista*. Although it is yet to be confirmed, the team is reluctant to confirm online support in the region. "It is too hard to find a solution to play online across Europe," explains Funamizu-san. "There are too many regional standards. If we had to wait until the market is ready in Europe the game would never be released." On the other hand, European gamers will be the beneficiaries of localised content. "We aim to make courses and cars specific to each market. Even if the versions are almost the same, I feel it is important to put some specific features according to the market."



"If gameplay isn't any good, beautiful graphics won't be sufficient. Capcom is trying to review all of its projects to deliver a higher level of quality. This is the rule"



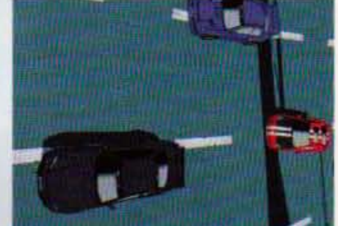
There's also the slim chance that multiplatform development may yet hold the possibility of online play in Europe; although it is currently only slated for release on PlayStation2, it's also been developed so as to be relatively easy to port to other platforms. "For the moment we're starting with PlayStation2 because it is the market leader. Of course it would be technically very easy to develop for Xbox and we have also already had a few propositions, to port a version of the game onto an arcade board."

Which isn't to say that the team is dissatisfied with Sony's hardware. Indeed in many ways, the technical idiosyncracies of the machine seems in part to have been responsible for some of the ingenuities of *Auto Modellista*. "Many people complain about the difficulties of PS2 development, but as you get more involved in programming for it, you begin to understand its potential. I think that people haven't looked hard enough for new ways to program the PS2. I refuse to give up a feature because it appears impossible to do. I prefer to search for different ways to get results. With *Auto Modellista*, we had to search for a new aesthetic, distinct from the more common realistic approach. And in light of what we've achieved, I want to apply the same search for originality in the four or five titles I'm in charge of."

Of course it's too early to judge just how successful *Auto Modellista* will be, but Funamizu's fresh approach can only be a good thing.









***Gran Turismo* obviously paved the way for vehicle customisation, but *Auto Modellista* combines it with increased accessibility and online communication via network play features**





Photography: **Martin Thompson**

Inside...

Big Blue Box

Two brothers with funding from Microsoft, support from Lionhead and a game with no name which has been 12 years in conception. Edge travels to Surrey to learn more

They still haven't got a proper name for it. Two years into the development of *Project Ego* and **Dene** and **Simon Carter**, the brothers behind Big Blue Box, are still searching for that elusive all-encompassing moniker for their progressive RPG. "It's been the toughest part of the development process so far," they sigh before assuring **Edge** that they'll think of something in the next two weeks.

Rewind 18 months and the last thing on the brothers' minds was a game title. In 1998, they left Bullfrog after having worked on two of the once great developer's key games, *Magic Carpet* and *Dungeon Keeper*. EA was in the process of replacing the studio's ambitious original products with reams of branded sequels, and the Carters wanted out. So they set up Big Blue Box realising an ambition for creative independence that had been quietly harboured since they first started working on games (Dene's first was the excellent *Gauntlet*-style C64 shooter *Druid*). What followed wasn't quite the fantasy process they might have envisaged. "We spent two years in publisher wilderness," says Simon without a trace of bitterness. "We'd get into these six-month relationships, then the company would turn around and tell us that they didn't want to handle original games. We realised they were just stringing us along until we agreed to do a licence." Which was never going to happen.

Peter's friends

Fortunately, the Carters retained their close relationship with one Peter Molyneux who himself left Bullfrog after being asked to attend one endless product meeting too many. Via a new 'satellite studio' scheme, Molyneux helped to fund the setting up of Big Blue Box, and offered his own company as an administrative and creative resource. As Simon Carter explains, "We realised that in order to make original games you need a smaller team so you can keep things under control a bit more. And









"We find that the area around your development studio effects the building design more than any other factor. If you look at *Syndicate* – it is essentially set in Guildford Business and Retail Park"

with Lionhead taking control of the businessy side of things, the testing and the sound, we can keep our core team relatively small and concentrate on making games." "We have a suit-free environment," adds Dene with relish.

The Carters are keen to point out, however, that BBB is an autonomous company. It is no longer financially supported by Lionhead, as funding now comes from Microsoft. Plus, the passing of information between the companies is a two-way thing. Lionhead does lend out its own dev tools, but it is just as likely to borrow tools developed at BBB. The fraternal, supporting role remains strong, though. "If we were out there on our own we'd have to worry about so much other stuff. As managing directors, we wouldn't be able to concentrate on writing the game – which is what we're best and what we enjoy," says Simon. Dene cuts in, "I mean we're developing a next-gen game for heaven's sake and we've got one of the smallest teams I know of. But with all the extra facilities at Lionhead we're effectively a much bigger team than we seem to be."

As far as game design consultancy goes, there can be few more valuable partners. "If things go tits up with the design process there are talented people at Lionhead that we can get feedback from," continues Simon. Molyneux himself is keenly watching the development of the game, occasionally tinkering with it and offering suggestions. "Peter's involvement is largely as a kind of design overseer. He has an uncanny ability to work out what people want in games and he's fantastically useful as a sounding board for various ideas, and for generating new bits and pieces that we might not have thought of otherwise, but which he intuitively understands work in games."

Those who have experienced *Black & White* will also be able to attest to Molyneux's ability to make complex gameplay ideas accessible to a wide audience. As the aim with *Project Ego* is to humanise the RPG and get away from the geekdom usually associated with the genre, his experience has proved especially valuable. Although those who found themselves waiting for *B&W* as it drifted past launch date after launch date will be able to identify with Simon's single complaint, "On occasion Peter would like us to develop a game that would take 50 years. He does tend to be exceedingly ambitious."

In addition to Big Blue Box, Lionhead has now branched out its satellite system to include two more start-ups. Black and White Studios in Guildford which will handle forthcoming *B&W* spin-offs, conversions and sequels, and Intrepid Games, based in Wimbledon, which is currently working on an original Xbox title.

The ego has landed

Referring to *Project Ego* as an RPG immediately provokes assumptions that the Carter brothers are keen to distance themselves from. "RPG videogames have never lived up to our expectations," Simon explains. "In pencil and paper 'D&D' you really shape your character – but somewhere along the line RPG games lost that aspect. So we're abandoning the trappings of the RPG – the elves, orcs, magic systems and inventories. We want to get back to the basic principles of the role playing game."

At a very fundamental level, this has meant discarding the standard Tolkien foundations. Instead Dene cites Grimm's fairytales as the main influence on the *Project Ego* universe.

There are no 2D texturemaps providing background scenery – if you see a hill in the distance you can walk to it. Everything is real

"Most other games stand on the shoulders of Tolkien and we really didn't want that. We also wanted to create a world where people react to the strange and unnatural in what you'd term a realistic way. So if some evil creature crept out of the darkness and tried to steal one of their children, they wouldn't just go, 'Oh dear its an orc. Now orcs have 32 hit points so I'll need to use this fire arrow, I think.' That's a very horrible and smug way of playing a game. We wanted a world where people live in huddled communities against the darkness – and if you look at Grimm's fairytales this is very much the atmosphere they create."

That Grimm feel is immediately evident in the scenery: the lush, sylvan woodlands are filled with stylised Christmas card villages, but there's also the sense of menace. Nomad tribes and wild beasts lurk in the darkness of the forests, too. It's also an amazingly organic environment – and it's huge. The team wouldn't say how big, but if your character stands on a relatively elevated position he has a viewing distance of around eight kilometres. And there are no 2D texturemaps providing background scenery – if you see a hill in the distance you can walk to it. Everything is real.

The game begins with your teenage character returning home to find his family slaughtered (The Carter brothers are keeping tight-lipped about who dunnit). Like *Shenmue* then, *Ego* is a quest for revenge, but it's one that will take many years, during which time the character noticeably ages. This is only one element of the game's naturalistic and distinctly human-centric approach to story telling.



Martin Bell
R&D programmer



Simon Carter
managing director/
lead programmer

Matt Dixon
assistant director/
senior programmer

Dene Carter
managing director/
lead designer

Pete Amachree
artist

Ian Lovett
art director

Ian Faichnie
artist

FAQ

Company name: Big Blue Box
Founded: 1998
HQ: Godalming, Surrey
Number of employees: 18
Projects in development: *Project Ego*





Project Ego features a number of NPC heroes who attempt to steal the allegiance of villagers

Players will also be able to heavily personalise their character with hundreds of different outfits, and user-definable tattoos (both available from village shops rather than impersonal menu screens). You can also get the guy to grow stubble and/or shave his head to help build a totally unique identity.

Meanwhile, the character's physical appearance is also affected by what you do in the game. Spend a lot of time wandering about in the sun and he'll get a tan; carry a lot of heavy objects and he'll develop muscles; fill him up every night with food and booze and he'll end up with a potbelly. Finally, if you get into a lot of fights – and lose – you'll end up with scars that stay for the rest of his life.

This isn't just about personalising the character – his appearance has effects on the game. If your avatar is a scar-covered skinhead with an all over tattoo, villagers will be too scared of him to offer information or hire him for a mission. If he's a hunk, he'll get chatted up – and that could be by either sex. Importantly, this is a living, breathing world. Each character, however irrelevant to the story has a life, a routine and a certain amount of sentience. As a result everything you do has consequences that emanate outwards. Burn a village down and the inhabitants have to move on, displacing other tribes or wildlife – it's chaos theory in motion.

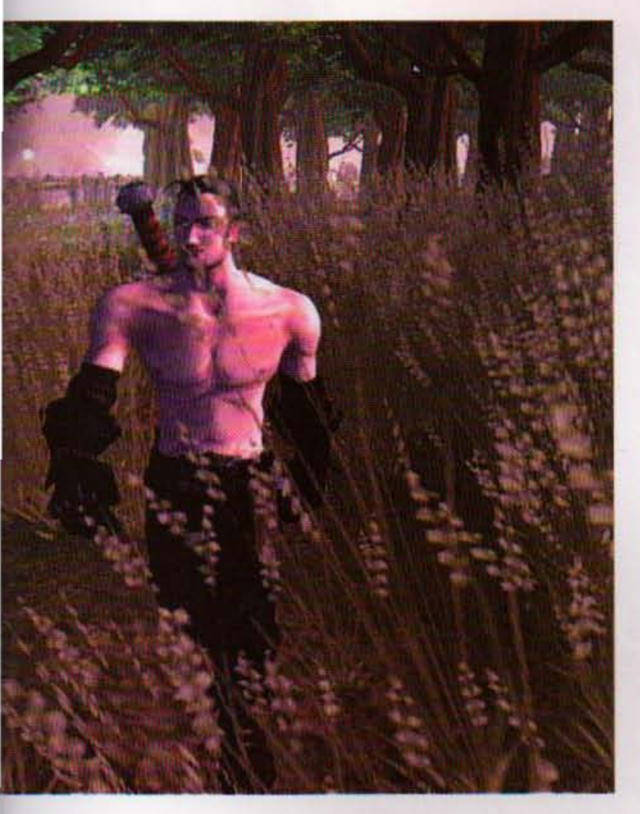
As far as plot is concerned, there is a linear story that runs through the whole game, but behind that there are myriad subplots and



Throughout the game various roles are open to the player. Apparently most people who have tested the game prefer to be an assassin

missions, which come up or don't come up depending on how you behave in the game world. The Carters were elusive on how the time system worked – obviously you can't have such minute control over the hero's whole life. What they would say is that there are certain plot related events throughout the experience that the player can't avoid. Beyond that they are free to explore and live how they want, although the game skips forward a few years from time to time, between major narrative events.

It sounds like a logistical nightmare, but Big Blue Box seems to have the task in hand. After all the Carters have been working on this concept for 12 years (Dene began designing



processor for running all the graphics stuff and you've got a sound processor for doing sound. With PS2 you get a bundle of chips which can be configured up to do whatever you want. And while that freedom is very nice and probably allows you to some very flexible things its an absolute bugger because you've got to make sure all these things work perfectly in sequence and in tandem."

The Xbox hard drive has also proved a liberating, indeed vital part of the *Project Ego* blueprint. As Simon confirms, "The hard disk is critical to the game due to the sheer amount of simulation data we're throwing around, it needs to be stored somewhere and the hard disk is the only thing that's big enough." Indeed the world of *Ego* is a chaotic one with ripples and ramifications spreading out from every action. You can't store that information on an 8Mb memory card. And just in terms of raw visuals, the brothers are keen to stress the benefits of Xbox over PS2. The latter has no texture compression, while the former can compress up to four times, "and because you can stream stuff straight from the hard disk with pretty much no latency, you end up with 16–32 times as much room for graphics as PS2," finishes Simon. This has essentially meant that so far the Big Blue Box artists have met with no polygon count barriers. "The lead

"Microsoft are great to work with. As soon as we said we were having trouble naming the game, they hired a company to help us"

the landscape system on the Atari ST). Their only worry is what people might do with the game when it's released. It is after all possible to wander around in just a pair of pants and a menacing sneer, and there are children running around everywhere. You can, **Edge** is sure, come up with your own Daily Mail headline.

X men

Like fellow Brits Bizarre Creations and Confounding Factor, Big Blue Box has been surprised and delighted by Microsoft's attitude to game development. "Microsoft are great to work with," says Dene without any prompting. "Any time we've wanted data they've got it. As soon as we said we were having trouble naming the game, they hired a company to help us."

According to Simon, BBB first hooked up with Microsoft at ECTS 2000. "They came up to us and said, 'Our focus is entirely on quality games, we don't care how you produce them'. It was every developer's dream." And when the team took delivery of the dev kit they were instantly impressed. "First of all there's the ease of development. It's a very simple architecture. You've got your main processor for running AI and game stuff, you've got a graphics

character alone takes up 16,000 polys," points out Simon, "which is more than the entire graphics engine in *Magic Carpet*."

Futureworld

"Our goal after this game is to move up to a team and a half, working on two products, prototyping the next game while working on a sequel to this one if its successful. But we don't want to expand our boundaries so much that we lose the small company mentality," states Simon. However, even if the game is a gargantuan hit, don't expect a sequel to be inevitable. "If it's appropriate, if it's not just cashing in, then we'll do it," says Dene, "It would be nice to see where the world goes next – the same way you would with a TV series. We've spent so much time building this world and the people who inhabit it, I would be interested to see where they go afterwards."

After 15 years in development, you sense that the Carter brothers, and more recently their close-knit team, are as enthusiastic about *Ego* as they were at the beginning. If it works it could be one of the most intriguing and immersive gaming experiences Britain has produced. And there is a good feeling here, a feeling that it will work.









The game features an online community site where players can exchange characters and experiences and send each other postcards of key successes


Power Struggle
PlayStation 2



The year 2002 will be one of the most exciting in videogame history. But with three main players fighting for your wallet, where will your loyalties lie?

To a true videogame enthusiast there is nothing quite like the smell of fresh packaging. The first cardboard seals are undone and the polystyrene casement slides smoothly out of its box. With reverence the plastic bags are opened and the cable ties unwound. For a true videogame devotee the wrapping is almost as precious as its contents. But not quite.

In 2002, millions will be savouring the thrill of extracting a shiny new console from its packaging and firing up a next-generation title. *Mario Sunshine*, *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Halo*. Titles to obsess over. For many consumers the choice of console has already been made. Hype, word-of-mouth, brand loyalty – these things will always sway public opinion. But for the first time ever the notion that the market might support three consoles at one time does not seem so farfetched. Certainly, GameCube, Xbox and PS2 appeal to different tastes.

It's always folly to predict the future, especially in the world of videogames where even behemoth companies come and go. But for those who are still unsure about which console to purchase, **Edge** offers the definitive guide on the future of the three main players. Of course, you could always find room to store three more boxes in the loft…

PS2 060 >
GC 068 >

Photography: Martin Thompson

PlayStation2





I t looked like an outlandish hi-fi, the games were awful and developers were already grumbling about the complicated architecture. But when it launched on March 4th, 2000 the PlayStation2 sold 980,000 units (making it the most successful launch of a console by a huge margin). But ever since, Sony's second console has held the dubious title of being the most hyped games machine ever conceived.

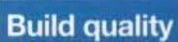
It's a situation which has generated ambivalence across the board. If consumers, publishers and developers were to gather around a table to judge the machine, it would receive wildly mixed responses. Developers still feel that the wrong architecture was chosen; consumers see it as a good prospect underperforming; while publishers are now beginning to warm to a platform which has the potential to make them a lot of cash. But for many, the first 18 months of the PS2's life has been woefully disappointing.

Certainly, the 'x' factor has been missing. Sony cleverly labelled its 128bit CPU the 'Emotion Engine', a move which instantly set tongues wagging about the potential for deeper, more profound game experiences (hype which Sony did little to discourage). But the dissatisfaction of being offered soulless and derivative games at launch, such as *Ridge Racer V* and *Tekken Tag Tournament*, couldn't have been more dismaying. Only the captivating, yet esoteric, *Fantavision* offered something innovative.

In its favour Sony made the bold move to include DVD playback out of the box. It was a decision which encouraged many Japanese consumers to buy a PS2 (entry level DVD players were still expensive at the time). However, while the sales of DVDs tripled in the week the PS2 launched, software sales remained worryingly low. A trend which has only begun to pick up in recent months.

Now, 18 months on, things are looking much rosier for PS2 owners. Developers are coming to terms with the parallel architecture and fears that the PS2 would suffer the same fate as the Sega Saturn now seem ridiculous. A mixture of hard work, trial and error and middleware tools is also ensuring that development cycles are getting shorter and game quality improving. It's taken much longer than anticipated, but exceptional titles are beginning to come through. *Devil May Cry*, *Pro Evolution Soccer*, *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Rez* and *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, among others, will be giving PS2 owners much pleasure over the holiday period. The PS2 release schedule for 2002 is equally impressive and Sony estimate that there are some 300 titles currently in development.

It is difficult to argue against PlayStation2's dominance over the next two years. Price cuts in every territory plus the prospect of games enhanced by hard drive and Internet functionality will come to fruition soon. The only thing which must remain a worry to Sony is how long the PS2 can stay ahead of the baying pack. In a couple of year's time the machine may well have reached its peak – at least technically. It's a worry highlighted by the company's decision to bring forward the arrival of PlayStation3.



Build quality

Though the majority of PS2 owners have had no cause for complaint about the build quality of their ribbed console, there were a few problems for Sony early on. Japanese consumers were delighted to find that they could watch region 1 DVDs, until a blushing Sony remedied the situation by putting the correct regional lock-out data into the drivers. BBC's 'Watchdog' also made a big issue out of the number of faulty PS2s on the market after the machine launched in the UK (the number of complaints was actually relatively low). But a noisy fan and a slightly delicate disk tray are the only real criticisms that can be levelled at an otherwise solid and durable machine.



Total control

The original controller for the PlayStation was revolutionary, blending comfort with a more ergonomic three-dimensional moulding. Since then the addition of the DualAnalogue sticks and the excellent DualShock rumble facility has ensured that the device has become somewhat iconic worldwide. However, analogue control has improved markedly and the decision to keep a modified version of the DualShock controller for PS2 has disappointed many. Certainly – by comparison to the GameCube and Xbox sticks – the PS2 analogue sticks are imprecise and flaccid. The addition of analogue buttons has proved somewhat redundant, with only the imaginative *Bravo Music* taking full advantage.





Developers are coming to terms with the parallel architecture and fears that the PS2 would suffer the same fate as the Sega Saturn now seem ridiculous

Significant events:



March 1999
Sony officially unveiled plans for its 'next generation' PlayStation at Tokyo's International Forum Centre to 1,500 delegates. Nine technical demos admirably showcased the capabilities of the hardware, with much of the excitement focusing on *Tekken Tag Tournament*'s footage showing smoke billowing from street drains and grass blowing in the breeze. It was an impressive glimpse of the future, provoking Jez San to exclaim, "Amazing. It's amazing."

September 1999
Ken Kuturagi ended months of speculation by revealing Sony's new console at Tokyo's ANA Hotel. Imaginatively titled 'PlayStation2' and looking like a miniature '2001: A Space Odyssey' monolith, the design was well received by the 900 attendees and clearly intimated Sony's desire to give the console broad appeal. However, the decision to go with only two controller ports and merely modify the DualAnalogue controller disappointed some.

February 2000
Squaresoft's CEO, Tomoyuki Takechi announced ambitious plans to optimise *Final Fantasy X* and *Final Fantasy XI* for Sony's Play Online portal before the end of 2001. The portal would also support full e-commerce trading, browser facilities and the ability to download video clips and music. Today, Play Online is operating to a limited degree, but *Final Fantasy X* only made it as a singleplayer experience.

March 2000
Launch day and after much camping in doorways, some pushing and shoving and a noteable theft from one consumer, a remarkable 980,000 units sold out in just two days. Demand was so high that consoles, priced at ¥39,800 (£230), were being traded over the Internet for up to ¥120,000 (£720) just days afterwards. However, the phenomenal response was muted by the lack of good games and poor software sales.

November 2000
Anticipation levels were high but shipping problems and a controversial pre-order scheme resulted in a desultory 80,000 units shifting at the European launch. But worse, the intervening time between eastern and western launches had seen little in the way of quality software coming through. Only *TimeSplitters* and *Silent Scope* gave early European adopters something to crow about.

Peripherals



8Mb memory card

At £25 Sony's memory card isn't cheap and the price aggrieved many who had already paid up to £300 for their PS2. But the card has proven to be glitch-free and more than sufficient to store multiple game data. However, those with too many precious saved games can now buy thirdparty expansion cards which can boost data storage to up to 32Mb.



HDD

The official HDD offers 40Gb of storage which can be used for scratch space and for downloading data via the PS2 network adaptor. But the success of the device hangs in the balance. Will developers design features to make use of the facility? Many may wait to see if the HDD sells well, but at ¥18,000 (£102) consumers could wait indefinitely.



DVD remote control

Not the most exciting peripheral available perhaps, but a necessity for those used to the leisurely pace of modern living. The official device costs $25 (it has yet to be released in the UK) but there are plenty of thirdparty versions on the market. Unlike Microsoft's Xbox, the DVD player can be operated through a standard controller.



Keyboard/TFT screen

A deal with Telewest sent out a strong message about Sony's commitment to online connectivity. To take advantage of such services, keyboards, mice and TFT screens may well become a fixed part of the PS2 experience. Sony have yet to release these devices officially, but thirdparty keyboards are about ¥4,000 (£23) with the screens coming in at £85.

Getting hold of a PS2

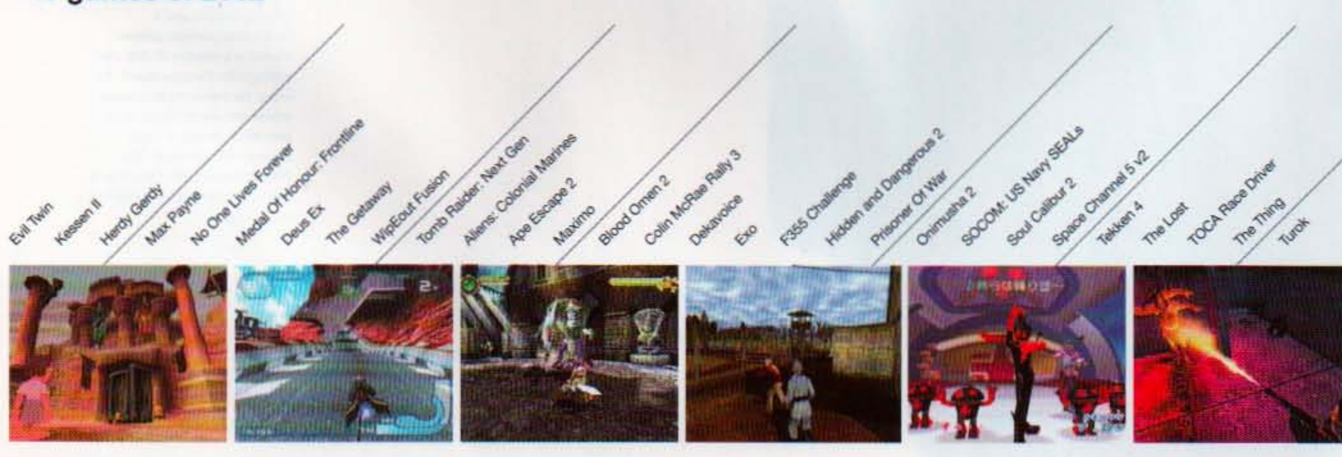
Sony's decision to drop the price to £199 for Christmas was a serious blow to the competition. With no Xbox until March and no definite release date for the GameCube, Sony is rubbing its hands at the prospect of a clean sweep in Europe. But the situation is not so clearcut in other territories. Reports suggest that the GameCube had a better launch day than the PS2 in America and the Xbox saw equally frenzied activity at retail.

But for UK consumers there is only one real choice this Christmas: PS2. While the Dreamcast value pack at £99 offers amazing value, it will do little to combat the long term prospects of Sony's machine. The standard unit with one controller is £199, but high street stores are enticing shoppers with a number of deals. Here is a selection:

Dixons Ultimate package
PS2 + extra controller, official 8MB memory card, *WRC*, *Rayman M*, *Crazy Taxi* and *TimeSplitters* £309.
HMV
PS2 + *Grand Theft Auto III*, *The Weakest Link*, *Crazy Taxi*, *Monkey Island*, *TimeSplitters* and DVD Remote control £309.93
MCV
PS2 + buy any game and you receive a Joytech controller plus DVD remote control free
Electronics Boutique
PS2 + *Red Faction* £219.99
Currys
PS2 + 'Charlie's Angels' DVD + *Crazy Taxi* £229



The games of 2002



Industryopinion

I think it will be very interesting. Historically we have not had three plausible competitors for very long. Sony is certainly well established now, and has some excellent titles at long last. It is fashionable at the moment for developers to criticise the performance of PS2, but this is not very different to the GameCube, at least – possibly better. The extra price of the Xbox, ugliness of the box, and fewer attractive titles (*Halo* notwithstanding), I think will be major factors in how the machine does. I would expect it to come third in the 'race', despite a doubtless huge Microsoft ad spend. So my money is on Sony holding its top position for a long while yet at least, with the biggest threat being GameCube (especially if the promised thirdparty GameCube machines start to appear). The Xbox is the better spec machine but then, so was the N64 last time around and it did not win through.
David Braben, managing director, Frontier Developments

I think there's no doubt Sony has built up a formidable lead, and the pricepoint right now is bang on. Nintendo and Microsoft are tough competitors, and I'm sure both Xbox and GameCube will sell 1.5m units in all of the territories, but the real test for these machines will be to see what they do in their second year. Sony have struck it big with titles such as *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Metal Gear Solid 2*, and *Pro Evolution Soccer*, but also with new franchises such as *Devil May Cry* and *Jak And Daxter*. Next year, there will no doubt be sequels to these games alongside the shipping of the hard disk and broadband adapter. Right now, I find it difficult to believe anyone could convincingly argue against the crown remaining with Sony.
David Lau-Kee, managing director, Criterion

Sony will dominate the market with PS2 perhaps even more so than they did with the PlayStation. The reasons are simple: Sony is the best consumer electronics company in the world. Mums and dads own Sony televisions and videos and trust the brand for their children. There are over 70 million PlayStations in the world and people are usually averse to changing brands. Most of the world's best games design talent is developing games for PS2. There are several 'must have' titles exclusive to PS2. Sony has made gaming 'cool' through both its advertising and youth life-style association. So for me the war is over before it has even begun.
Ian Livingstone, executive chairman, Eidos Interactive

Sony, sadly, have saturated the market. Regardless of the multi-billion dollar marketing campaigns that have been researched, focus grouped and play-tested, Microsoft are going too high-brow and Nintendo too subconscious. Joe Punter will see that triangle, circle, x and square and shell out for the familiar.
Aleks Krotoski, presenter, 'Thumb Bandits'

Conclusion

Sony's first battle has already been won: a 20m global installed userbase is a figure which already puts it in a commanding position. Even more devastating to the competition is the PlayStation brand, which is now synonymous with videogaming worldwide. But there are chinks in the armour. Though developers now seem happier programming for the PS2, the notion that the machine is hard to work for has stuck. Triple-A titles have been thin on the ground, too, with the Xbox launch line-up, in particular, proving a bad omen for Sony. Though the PlayStation brand will continue to dominate over the next two years, its strength is sure to be more in question by 2004.



Six of the best



TimeSplitters2

The original *TimeSplitters* is still one of the better multiplayer games around, but it was unjustly criticised for its lack of a deep and rewarding singleplayer experience. Although the emphasis will still be on multiplayer mayhem, a mission structure is being built into the sequel. This will include interaction with characters in the game world and objectives to incentivise the player. The hand drawn animation is magnificent and all the weapons are suitably 'beefy'. A very good prospect.



Stuntman

Definitely one of those 'why did no one think of it before?' concepts. *Stuntman* asks the player to drive vehicles in six consecutive Hollywood movies, from gangster flicks to a Honk Kong-based Bollywood epic. The stunts can be performed over and over again, allowing the player to perfect their technique and make the sequence as dramatic as possible. Reflections (of *Destruction Derby* and *Driver* fame) have a good track record and this will be a formidable summer release.



Dead to Rights

Thirdperson action titles have traditionally failed to impress due to clunky controls and absent minded cameras. It is an issue that Namco's US team are assiduously tackling to make *Dead to Rights* the most fluid and user-friendly espionage title to date. Key manoeuvres will include a disarm command and the ability to slow down time while shooting and diving for cover. Hopefully the enemy AI will keep everything tense and challenging.



Final Fantasy XI

Falling somewhere between *EverQuest* and *Phantasy Star Online*, Square's latest *Final Fantasy* game is already looking sumptuous. There is still scant information about the ultimate quest (or if there actually is one). Nevertheless, having the ability to form alliances, fight super-deformed creatures and raise Chocobos should provide many hours of sociable entertainment. Unfortunately it may just be too full of *Final Fantasy* enthusiasts for the tastes of many.



Virtua Fighter 4

Already thrilling arcade fans in Japan, *Virtua Fighter 4* is set to take on *Soul Calibur 2*, *Tekken 4* and *Dead or Alive 4* in a head-to-head contest next year. In reality the series has always relied on an intricate block/counter-attack dynamic to set it apart from the more bombastic competition. Yu Suzuki is also ensuring that it will impress in the graphical department. Don't expect a radical departure from previous versions, but do expect a masterful conversion.



Auto Modellista

Exclusively previewed this issue, *Auto Modellista* is a truly mouthwatering prospect. Like any graphical technique, cel-shading can be used to good or bad effect. Fortunately, current evidence shows a high degree of artistry and refinement in the visual department, with the technique also being applied to lighting and blurring effects. The game will also take advantage of online options, giving players the chance to search for opponents, chat and swap components.

Xbox





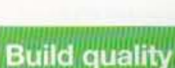
The computer community would have it as a wolf in sheep's clothing, and a look inside the black box reveals the component structure of the console to be almost identical to that of a desktop machine. But while obsessively spec-happy fansites across the Web have been quick to decry Microsoft's entry into the console market as just an underspecced PC, they're somewhat missing the point. One of the box's greatest strengths is that PC programmers can finally work towards constant system specs, rather than optimising a game for a speculative minimum. The other is that games, in theory at least, should be free of the crash/patch cycle that's symptomatic of developing for a constantly evolving system.

So, while the Xbox's 733Mhz Intel processor, a direct descendent of x086 architecture never designed for videogaming, relies on brute force over elegant construction, it's the graphics chip that shines. A proprietary version of nVidia's GeForce 3, it provides display capabilities that, on technical facility alone, exceed those of its competitors. While many of the launch titles aren't visually overwhelming, *Dead or Alive 3* seems to sum up the box's strong points perfectly; beauty and power.

There's little subtlety to the casing, with a plastic exterior that feels solid but looks cheap, and a giant green branding 'jewel' (Microsoft's quotes, not **Edge**'s) on the roof that does little to enhance its appearance. And of course it's big, or at least it is if you put it next to a Dreamcast or GameCube. But, importantly, it's actually smaller than a VCR, and less ostentatious than anecdotal evidence would have you believe. It doesn't look out of place in front of a TV, or, significantly, on top of a DVD player or cable box.

The presence of four controller ports (and 9ft controller cords, as Microsoft's initial press releases were at pains to point out) is welcome, and the network port allows multi-console gaming as well as providing access to broadband connectivity. That comes with the purchase of an as-yet-unavailable broadband adaptor (although the tech-savvy will be able to use home networking to connect their Xboxes to each other via their PCs). The machine's ability to play DVDs also stands as another optional extra, and perhaps a reasonably cheeky one in the face of the base unit's hefty $299 pricetag.

Software support at launch was strong, something of a surprise in the face of a development community that initially seemed reticent to get onboard unproven hardware. Strong sales in the US and a good reception for the first wave of titles should see a little less commitment caution, and Xbox is also likely to become the homebrew console of choice, with a port of arcade emulator MAME already existing for the machine some months before it was released. Sites like xboxgw.com (creators of a viable online service for the box, initially, ironically, via Linux) and xboxhacker.net (devoted to Xbox system modifications) can only be symptomatic of a community who already seem to have the larger aim of reverse engineering the console back into a PC.



Build quality

It's strong, stable, and well constructed, albeit with a lack of aesthetic subtlety that's somewhat disheartening for a company so intent on making a good impression. The DVD tray is as firm as could be expected, significantly stronger than its PS2 counterpart, the buttons are solid, and there's nothing else that moves. No subtleties. Of all the next generation consoles, this is the one you'd most like to be hit on the head with.

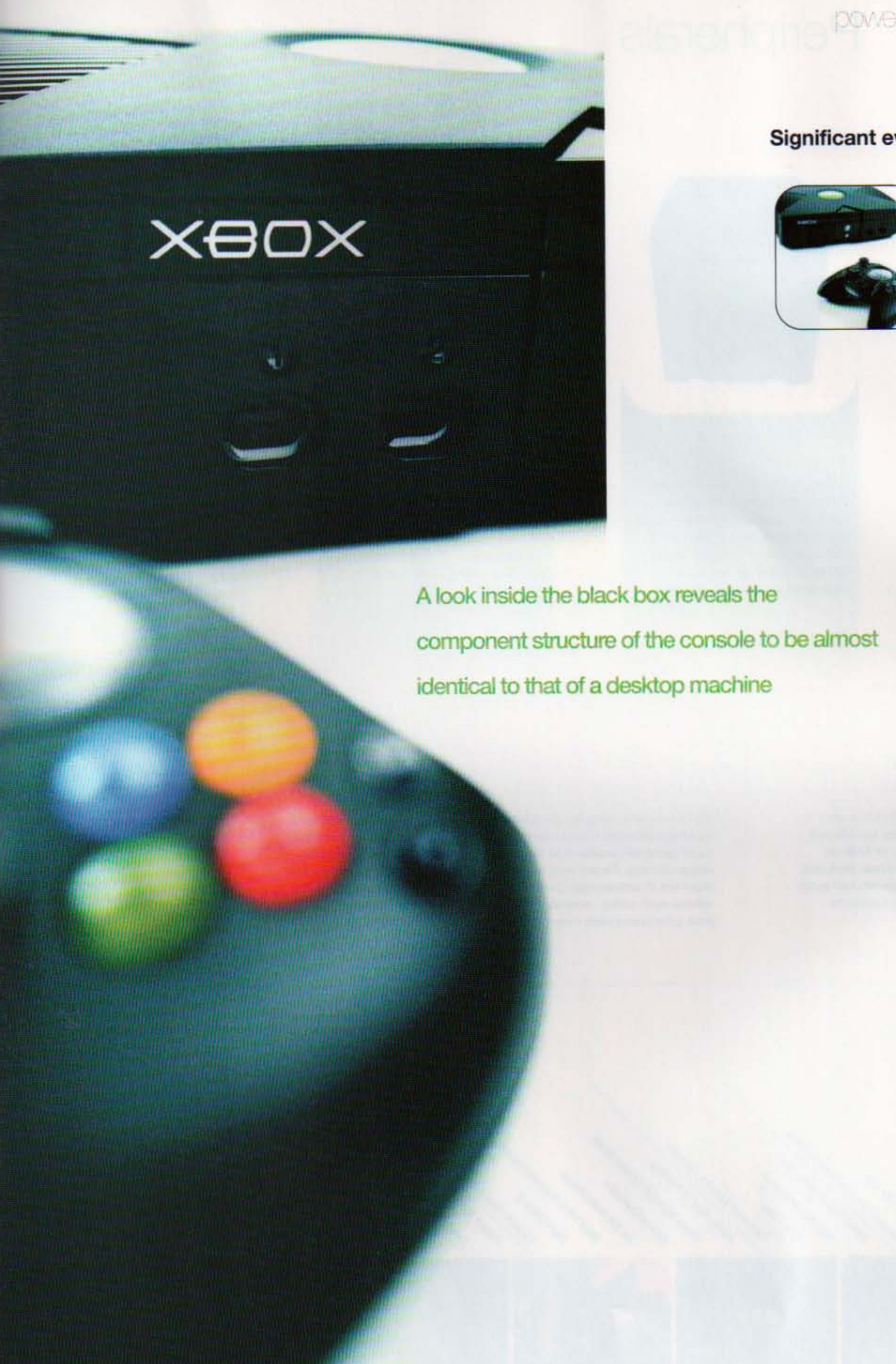


Total control

It's definitely fat, and it's very, very ugly, but that doesn't stop the Xbox pad from having the best analogue sticks of the three next-generation controllers. They're firm and responsive, as are the analogue triggers whose comfort is somewhat dependent on the size of the player's hands. The face buttons, though, have been universally derided, and rightfully so. Confusing, unwieldy, and even painful at times, their shape and placement defies rational explanation.







Significant events:

April 2000,
San Jose, Jay Allard confirms the console for an autumn 2001 launch, showing **Edge** a selection of graphics demos, illustrating the power of a prototype of the machine. He also announces Microsoft's intentions to make Xbox "the platform of choice for the best and most creative game developers in the world". Those same developers begin their creativity right away, with one announcing of the machine's hard drive, "Why do I think it's in there? Because Xbox uses Windows. Without it, it'll fall over."

January 2001
Microsoft pulls out all the stops and hire WWF superstar The Rock to show off the finished Xbox aesthetics at the CES in Las Vegas. They also demonstrate two exclusive games, one of which is Oddworld Inhabitant's *Munch's Oddysee*; the other is the not-so-exclusive *Malice*. The design of the console itself meets with relative approval, although some express reservations over the box's size. The controller comes in for more criticism though, with **Edge** accusing Microsoft of "over-egging the pudding" with "PC-style over-complication".

A look inside the black box reveals the component structure of the console to be almost identical to that of a desktop machine

March 2001
The console is presented to the Japanese public for the first time at the Tokyo Game Show, to a mixed reception. The size of the machine amuses many but impresses few, and the smaller joypad appears more comfortable, but the tortuous video wall explanation of its creation (inspired, apparently, by Japanese history) is cringe-worthy. Bill Gates makes a keynote speech and announces *Panzer Dragoon*, *Jet Set Radio Future*, and *Dead Or Alive 3*, but the real talking point is in the cafeteria, where images of the Microsoft supremo holding a burger and an Xbox controller serve as placemats.

May 2001
The first real head-to-head clash between Microsoft and Nintendo, and Microsoft comes away badly bruised. A shambolic press conference, with amateurish presentation and badly behaved video, appears to illustrate a lack of preparation on the part of the Seattle giant, and in the light of the GameCube's colour Microsoft appears all too serious, its austere desktop branding running throughout its displays. The most serious problem, though, comes with its 'killer app': *Halo* shows little indication of its brilliance, exuding mediocrity and serious frame-rate problems.

October 2001 X01,
In a trip postponed and reworked following the September 11th tragedies, Microsoft flies select members of the press to a clifftop mansion overlooking the Côte d'Azur. As **Edge** report, it's an extravagant gesture "befitting the arriviste nature of the console", but perhaps most importantly it gives the assembled journalists the chance to play many of the games for the first time. Reactions are favourable, with *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Halo*, *Dead Or Alive 3* and *GunValkyrie* standing out for particular attention.

November 2001
Microsoft hits its deadline: queues wound around the stores, and Times Square counted down; retailers issued press releases confirming a sell-out success; and the world's press reprinted pictures of Bill Gates living it up with Edward Glucksman, the first lucky punter to receive one. Non-PR-spun sales figures are still unclear, but while most reports have the GameCube as outselling the Xbox, both machines performed well enough for the commercial conflict to be far from over.

Peripherals



Memory card

Since the Xbox saves games to the hard disk (which makes saving faster and, sometimes, barely noticeable), memory cards aren't essential. However, they do mean players can easily move saved games from one machine to another.



Broadband adaptor

Plugging into the Xbox's ethernet port, the broadband adaptor allows access to the Internet at speeds significantly higher than the Dreamcast's modem permits. Those with a home computer already connected to the Net may find a cheaper solution in home networking.



DVD remote

It may have come from Microsoft's eagerness to prove itself to be focusing on the games, but the decision to hold back the in-the-box DVD capabilities of the machine has left some consumers feeling like they're buying their Xbox in instalments.



HDTV

Supporting all manner of high definition component video signals, and digital and surround sound capabilities, including Dolby Digital 5.1, those who have next-gen TVs and next-gen sound systems to go with their next-gen consoles will find the cable compulsory.

Getting hold of an Xbox

While pre-orders were available in bundles only – both Toys R Us and Electronics Boutique based retail packages around advice from Microsoft – many shops took to selling the unit alone on launch day, for $299. UK consumers saw the demands of the pricier import shops peak, predictably, just after launch at around £800. eBay bids fluctuated too, with post-launch panic and memories of the PlayStation2 launch shortage pushing the price of many units astronomically high.

Still, for those who managed to avoid immediate temptation, current online auctions are providing opportunities to buy the base unit at under £300, and the strong value of the pound against the Canadian dollar is making Canadian exporters the canny importer's weapon of choice. The only worry comes from regional differences: some may cite the Xbox's lack of hardware region protection as a reason to buy from abroad, but the software region coding – nominally optional for publishers, but which will presumably prove to be commonplace – may prove trickier to hack than if it were hardwired.



The games of 2002

Wreckless: The Yakuza Mission
Halo: Combat Evolved
NHL 2002
Unreal Championship
Malice: Kat's Tale
Max Payne
Nightcaster
Star Wars: Obi-Wan
Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding
SWAT: Global Strike Team
Batman: Vengeance
SSX Tricky
Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee
Azurik: Rise Of Perathia
Circus Maximus: Chariot Battle
Genma Onimusha
Jet Set Radio Future
Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams
Soul Calibur 2
Nezmix: Have A Mice Day
Project Ego
Dead Or Alive 3
Rayman Arena
Hunter: The Reckoning
Crash
Maximum Chase
Sam And Max
Project Gotham
Brute Force
Outlaw Golf
Wrath
Terminator: Dawn Of Fate
WWF Raw















Industryopinion

The GameCube controllers are heavenly, the PS2 controllers are fine, but the Xbox controllers – they look like cheap toy spaceships and feel – well, shit (lumpy shit at that). The only controllers I can remember disliking more are the angled western Saturn one and the Jaguar one. But looks and feel aren't as important as association and product. Microsoft – I don't know. I can't think of a time when Xbox would ever have appealed to me in preference to PS2 or GameCube. There are plenty of players who want to associate with the cool and contemporary – and that's Sony – and there are the younger at heart (and those who control them) after something safe and fun for all the family – and that's Nintendo.
Gary Penn, product architect, Denki

Halo didn't blow me away initally. It opens like a PC title. But in a short space of time I was utterly captivated. Is it a 'killer app'? It could be, but commercially, it's still a nerdy PC-boys-only type game. Will it attract players who've grown up with PlayStation? I'm not sure. And will it attract hardcore PC FPS players? Again, I'm not sure, they'll all wait for the PC version, and drone on about how much more powerful their own hybrid PC's are over the Xbox.

The machine's a superb DVD player also, much better than the £500 Sony player I've already got. Will it be a success? I think so. They're in the business for the long haul. They will sell to early adopters and home cinema nuts, but for gamers, it comes down to the titles. The launch line-up just didn't impress me. Many titles felt unfinished and lacking polish, or like PC games. It's worth it for *Halo*, but what do I know? I bought a 3DO, a Jaguar and a Lynx.
Alex Ward, creative manager, Criterion Games

The Xbox vertex shaders aren't as flexible as the vector units on the PS2, but they can handle everything I've wanted so far, and are much easier to write than PS2 VU code. This gives Xbox developers a chance to avoid doing work, but also means that when you're trying to push the machine, you have time to go further – writing more different shaders and trying out lots of techniques, rather than having to waste time writing things like polygon clip functions. Where the Xbox really shines, though, is in the per-pixel programmability. It opens up all sorts of possibilities that just weren't practical before. Some Xbox games use full-screen antialiasing, while others (such as *Project Gotham*) do not. It is interesting that what the Xbox describes as 'not antialiased' is the same thing as what PS2 games call their 'antialiased mode'. People are saying that Xbox is just a PC in a box, but this really isn't true. There is a lot of room to treat it like a console, bypass the DirectX libraries, go direct to the hardware, and wring a load of extra performance out of it. I doubt you'll ever see something like *DOA3* running on Windows.
Shawn Hargreaves, lead programmer, Climax

Xbox must be taken seriously. We've been seriously impressed by what we've seen of both the machine and the people so far. Unusually, their first-generation games are outstanding, which hasn't historically been the case with comparable platforms. Imagine what the second-generation games are going to be like? Now that's a mouthwatering prospect.
Joe McDonagh, designer, Elixir

Conclusion

If the Xbox were a character in a generic 2D fighter, it'd be the strong, fat, ugly one. Initially uncomfortable, it's let down somewhat by the overdesigned controller, but the quality and range of software looks set to more than compensate for that. In *Halo* Microsoft has a game that's worth the price of the system itself, and the fact that it's so eager to prove itself a worthy competitor in the console market can only bode well for the future.



Six of the best



Jet Set Radio Future

Jet Set Radio was stunning, and *Future's* looking even better. Allowing its players the freedom to glide around Tokyo, spraying it cool and partaking in miniature anime rebellion, it was the game that brought cel-shading to the attention of gamers everywhere. While sales of the Dreamcast were poor (something that could be ascribed to a lack of marketing spend, or just consumer apathy for inline skating misdemeanours), *Jet Set Radio Future's* presence on the Xbox isn't about money. It's about style.



Panzer Dragoon

If *JSRF* gives the Xbox a subtle sheen of cool, then the presence of the *Panzer Dragoon* franchise gives it kudos amongst the hardcore. While no details have been released about the Xbox version, the mere whisper of its name was enough to make the Tokyo Game Show take the Microsoft machine a little more seriously. If nothing else, it'll serve to inflate eBay *Panzer Dragoon Saga* prices even further.



Elite 4

It's not, as far as **Edge** is aware, an Xbox exclusive, but the likelihood that it'll require a hard disk makes Xbox conceivably the sole console recipient of Frontier Developments' next work. It's playing it coy, as is their style, but even disregarding rumours of online play and persistent worlds, *Elite 4* could be enough to woo thousands of people captured by earlier iterations of Bell and Braben's universe.



Galleon

An early visit to Confounding Factor left **Edge** impressed by the freedom within Gard's world, but its appearance at X01 was dismal and wracked with frame-rate issues. But appearances at shows can be deceptive – see *Halo's* reception at this year's E3 – and there's still much anticipation for *Galleon*, albeit predominantly based on Gard's tomb raiding past.



Bounty Hunter

The darker of the two blends of firstperson shooting and space shooting previewed in **E**101 (the other being Point Blank's *Falcone: Enter the Maelstrom*), *Bounty Hunter's* smooth transition between flying and running is one strong selling point. If it can build on *Halo's* understated use of vehicle combat and multiplayer possibilities, it could prove unmissable.



Wreckless

A bombastic series of mission-based challenges in downtown Tokyo, *Wreckless* is *Midtown Madness* designed by histrionic anime fans. While *Project Gotham* shies away from destruction and forces the player to concentrate on the art of driving, *Wreckless* – or *Double S.T.E.A.L.*, to use its eastern title – takes an approach that's more *GTAIII* than *GT3*: get the job done however you can. Gaming folklore says exclusive driving games are important to mainstream success, and Microsoft will hope *Wreckless* persuades those with a penchant for petrol-based destruction to head towards its machine.

GameCube






Having fun is a serious business for Nintendo, and any hardware launch from the Mario co. cannot be ignored. GameCube's Japanese debut was quiet, and marred by the fact that the majority of buyers were taking the machine and just a single game home with them. Fortunately, the US launch was a much more frenzied affair, accompanied by the usual PR blitz. Nintendo claims that it was the fastest-selling of the three next-gen machines, and has hailed *Luigi's Mansion* as the biggest-selling launch title in history, beating *Super Mario 64*. According to Nintendo's figures, it shifted $100 million worth of GameCube merchandise on the first day, and sold over half a million units in the first week. So far, so good…

The trouble with 'opening week' figures is that practically every new system can be relied upon to sell out. There are enough early adopters and Nintendo fan-boys to soak up the first shipments – especially in the busy pre-Thanksgiving/Christmas periods. It remains to be seen whether GameCube will be able to compete against PS2's greater installed base, where you're convincing gamers to buy into a second system, and against Xbox, which has demonstrably greater power and a broader range of titles.

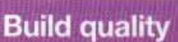
Of course, for UK gamers unwilling to swell the coffers of importers, the real test will be not *how* the machine does in Europe, but *when*. So far, Nintendo has been annoyingly tight-lipped about its appearance in PAL territories, leading to rumours of a September 2002 launch. **Edge** spoke to Nintendo's PR company who had neither a launch date, nor any idea when such a date might be forthcoming. Logic suggests it'll be some time around Easter, but in this instance, no news feels very much like bad news. And, in the meantime, the PS2 and Xbox campaigns gather momentum.

GameCube's main limitation is well documented – and fairly obvious. For **Edge**, the lack of DVD playback is a non-issue: it's a games machine, pure and simple. But for the massmarket, vaguely looking for a does-it-all multimedia machine, this could perhaps be a deciding factor when the three games systems are sitting side-by-side on Dixons' shelves. You can just picture the acned assistant brushing GameCube to one side, with a dismissive, "… but this one doesn't play DVDs."

Because of its diminutive style, GameCube is often referred to as 'cute', and it's easy to confuse size with power. On paper, the tech specs sound reasonable enough, but it's what developers are able to draw from the hardware that counts, and on this basis, GameCube seems to have all bases covered.

The five major releases – *Luigi*, *Wave Race*, *Monkey Ball*, *Pikmin* and *Rogue Leader* – all highlight GameCube's various abilities: glowing transparent ghosts, realistic water, flawless texture mapping, asset management and sheer polygon-shifting grunt. On paper, GameCube is quoted as being capable of rendering some 12 million polygons per second – a poor figure compared to PS2's 66 million and Xbox's 116 million. But Nintendo's specs err on the low side (unlike its competitors'), and its hardware features multipass rendering and lighting effects with little or no CPU overhead, so while GameCube may not shift as many polys as the PS2, they certainly look nicer.

And, of course, it's not how big your numbers are, but what you do with them; in terms of its graphical and audio ability, **Edge** has no real complaints so far.



Build quality

As with all of Nintendo's products, the GameCube is an efficiently designed and robust system, and the addition of a curved handle infers that it's capable of withstanding being transported around the house or neighbourhood. Certainly the immediate feeling is of squat sturdiness: shake it and nothing rattles – not even the plastic covers of the expansion ports.

The purple colour scheme of the first US and Japanese machines does a lot to reinforce the 'toy' label that's been levelled at the machine, but the black version has a much more businesslike air about it.



Total control

Nintendo's controller design is now seen as integral and important a part of the system as the architecture itself. But whereas the SNES pad introduced shoulder buttons, and the N64 pad introduced an analogue stick, the GameCube controller is more evolution than revolution. The major innovation is a separate camera stick, replacing the yellow C buttons of the N64, and progressive, analogue shoulder buttons. But while the pad is clearly very good, there are some niggles with the placement of the Z trigger and the overall size, which is just a shade too small for occidental hands.







Significant events:

Autumn 1998
Minoru Arakawa partakes in an interview with Japanese financial newspaper, Nihon Keizai Shimbun, during which he says that Nintendo is working on a next-generation system, codenamed 'N2000', expected in 2000 or 2001. When questioned about the storage medium, Arakawa admits that they are looking at all formats, including DVD, and that they will most likely forego expensive ROM cartridges.

May 1999
At a press conference at E3, Howard Lincoln provides the first concrete details on 'Project Dolphin'. Lincoln claims that Dolphin will be the equal of anything Sony can produce but that it will have a mass-market pricetag. Nintendo also announces its partnerships with Matsushita and IBM which are developing the system's disk drive and CPU technology. Launch date: Autumn 2000.

May 1999
Later that month, Nintendo announces that US-based chip designer Art-X is architecting the graphics chipset for Project Dolphin, and it will be mass produced by NEC at a custom-built plant in Japan. Art-X is eventually bought out by 3D card manufacturer ATI.

October 1999
Game Boy Advance is officially announced, along with promise of interconnectivity between GBA and GameCube.

August 2000
The final specs and case designs of GBA and GameCube are unveiled at Spaceworld 2000. The GBA launch is scheduled for March 21, 2001, while GameCube is due to arrive in July 2001 with five titles; the US launch will follow in October 2001.

August 2001
Nintendo raises eyebrows and expectations in equal measure with its all-too-brief previews of *Mario Sunshine* and GameCube *Zelda*. Disgusted at its new cel-shaded appearance, Americans instantly begin petitioning Nintendo to create a 'mature' *Zelda*. The online petition currently has over 9,400 signatures.

September 2001
GameCube finally goes on sale in Japan, with just three launch titles – almost a year late, and two games short. The Japanese response is decidedly muted, with little early-morning queueing, and gamers buying software in paltry numbers, often at the ratio of one game per machine. Thankfully, the US launch two months later is a much more positive affair.

You can picture the acned assistant brushing GameCube to one side, with a dismissive, "... but this one doesn't play DVDs"

Peripherals



Memory Card 59

Nintendo's Memory card 59 ($14.95), provides a meagre 4Mb of flash RAM. There are 59 'blocks' on board, enough for 19 *Luigi's Mansion* game saves or one *Madden NFL 2002*. A better alternative is the SD Digicard adaptor which accepts Panasonic's SD flash cards. These provide anything from 32 to 128Mb of storage, and open up other avenues for audio and graphics, beyond mere game saves.



Broadband/Modem adaptor

Nintendo has yet to reveal details about its online strategy, although the company has already shown prototypes of its Modem and Broadband adaptor. It's worth noting that Nintendo has been toying with various online systems for years in Japan, latterly with the Randnet system (in conjunction with the N64 and DD combo) which provided various multiplayer gaming and community services, plus email and web surfing.



Wavebird controller

This silver wireless controller provides freedom from joypad cables – simple as that. The RF receiver plugs into one of the controller ports and, according to Nintendo, can read Wavebird signals from up to ten metres away. Whether Nintendo has succeeded where the majority of thirdparty peripheral manufacturers have failed we'll have to see when it eventually hits the high street some time in 2002.



Game Boy Advance

Possibly the most important peripheral of them all. The potential for interactivity between NGC and GBA is well documented, and GBA has already sold millions of units worldwide. So it's now up to Nintendo and its thirdparty supporters to make the most of this opportunity, both to extend the videogaming experience, and also to cash in on GBA owners' built-in allegiance towards GameCube.

Getting hold of a GameCube

Grey importers in the UK are pretty much unanimous in their offers: basically, you'll get a modified US or Japanese machine (complete with external switch to toggle between US and Japanese standards), plus a game for around £399. Typical GameCube titles cost between £57 and £69 (depending on popularity) and additional joypads are £35 apiece. (And if you intend playing both US and Japanese games, you'll also need two memory cards, one formatted for each territory.)

Foreign importers such as Lik-Sang (www.lik-sang.com) are offering switchable consoles for £208 (though prices seem to vary daily). Currently, a console, extra controller and memory card will set you back £365. The fast courier service costs £48 and then you need to add on the dreaded import duty and VAT.

If you're visiting the US, at the moment you might have problems picking up a machine as they're selling out fast. There aren't many bundle deals available, presumably because the machine is selling well, and there's only a limited launch library. A machine will cost you the retail price of $199.95 (£140), with joypads $34.95 (£25), S-Video and stereo AV cables at $15.95 each (£11), and a component video cable at $29.95 (£21).



Games of 2002

Crazy Taxi
Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader
Batman Vengeance
Phantasy Star Online
Bloody Roar Extreme
Duke Nukem Forever
Pikmin
Rune
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem
Legend of Zelda
GameCube Mickey Mouse
Animal Forest Plus
Doshin the Giant
Donkey Kong Racing
Good Cop, Bad Cop
SSX Tricky
Galleon: Islands of Mystery
Bomberman Generation
Kameo: Elements of Power
Turok Evolution
Batman: Dark Tomorrow
Smash Brothers DX
Mario Kart for GameCube
Too Human
Thornado
Picassio
Saffire
Cel Damage
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2
The Simpsons Road Rage
NBA Courtside 2002
NFL Quarterback Club 2002
Kao The Kangaroo










Industryopinion

From its initial performance in the USA, it seems that having a point of difference in your product is what really matters. The console is designed to appeal to a younger audience and therefore seems to be able to define itself in the market place a little easier. For a gamer to choose between PS2 and Xbox it's likely to come down to small points of difference, whereas with GameCube I think you either want it or you don't.

But therein lies Nintendo's biggest obstacle for true international domination. The growth in adult-orientated gaming has enabled Sony to sprint away from the competition and it'll take some seriously groundbreaking titles on rival formats for it not to dominate this market again. For GameCube to be a true long-term success, I believe it must wholly embrace the adult market without jeopardising its own (albeit massive) niche with titles like *Mario* and *Pokémon*.
Glen O'Connell, communications director, Rage

While statistically it may not quite match up on paper, you can see from the visual quality of the software that the GameCube has more than enough horsepower to compete at the highest level, and with Nintendo's peerless IP's you have to expect a certain level of success. But following a lacklustre launch on home soil and more rumours of serious PAL delays, the big 'N' has a potentially shaky time ahead of it next year, particularly if key titles start slipping.
Ed Bartlett, lead game designer, The Bitmap Brothers

From a development perspective the GameCube is unusual in that you program at quite a high level. The software libraries keep you well away from the hardware, and we hope this high level of abstraction won't compromise performance too much. However it should make prototyping of games easier and quicker, and allow developers to spend more man-months on gameplay issues than technology issues.

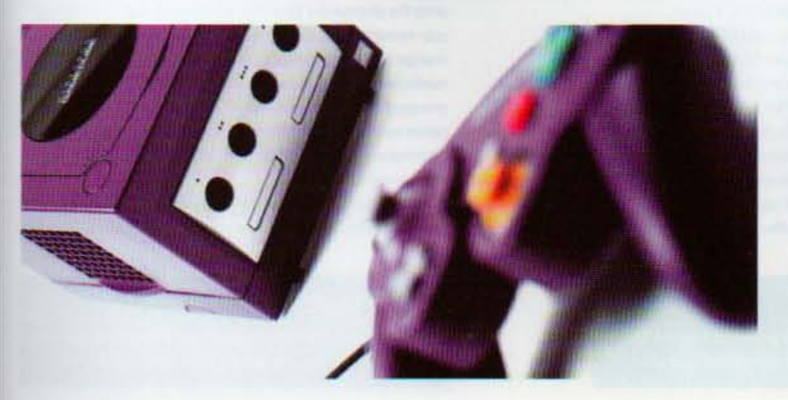
What has impressed me most so far is some of the tricks the initial software is getting up to. For example, the ghosts in *Luigi's Mansion* are stunning: they really look like shimmering transparent ghosts. This of course is just as much attributable to the developer's imagination as much as the power of the hardware – but I think this is the challenge of making games for the GameCube – developers must put 'creativity' before 'performance'.
Chris Gibbs, managing director, ATD

The underperformance – in Europe, at least – of the N64 ensured that Nintendo's next hardware would have to be pretty special in order to make up ground lost to Sony. There were huge expectations, and Nintendo really delivered: GameCube is a staggering achievement. The launch titles are strong, the controller is a triumph of design and aesthetically the GameCube just looks fun. Nintendo is bringing games full-circle, pulling the industry back from its often exaggerated seriousness. And that can only be a good thing.
Charles Cecil, managing director, Revolution

Conclusion

After the rather lacklustre Japanese showing and the limited range of launch titles, sentiments were mixed; it certainly didn't feel like the opening gambit of a major player. But, the success of GameCube in the US, and the growing list of thirdparty support, seems to suggest that the future is indeed looking rosy for Nintendo's next-gen system.

Only Nintendo's apparent disinterest with PAL territories casts a pall over the proceedings. If GameCube follows in the footsteps of N64 – delayed launch, postponed software, poor PAL conversions, lack of marketing spend – then GameCube could end up a very poor third in that small island off the coast of Africa they call 'Europe'.



Six of the best

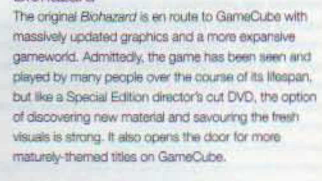


Mario Sunshine

Notably absent from the launch line-up, Mario remains Nintendo's trump card for the middle of 2002. Details are scant, save for the fact that the plumber's usual jumping dynamic is present, and he's equipped with some sort of crystalline backpack. The early demo at Spaceworld didn't show enough to be impressive, but *Mario* is the jewel in Nintendo's crown: expectations remain high.

Soul Calibur 2

The original Dreamcast version still impresses, and the thought of a graphically superior sequel – on a Nintendo system, of all things – is quite mouthwatering. Having said that, it's also destined for PS2 and Xbox as well...



Biohazard

The original *Biohazard* is en route to GameCube with massively updated graphics and a more expansive gameworld. Admittedly, the game has been seen and played by many people over the course of its lifespan, but like a Special Edition director's cut DVD, the option of discovering new material and savouring the fresh visuals is strong. It also opens the door for more maturely-themed titles on GameCube.



Metroid Prime

Now the sole project at ailing US codeshop Retro Studios, *Metroid Prime* has been the centre of rumour and controversy since its announcement in March of 1999. The continuing saga of Samus Aran against the Metroids suffered its greatest embarrassment when Shigeru Miyamoto declined to demo the game at Spaceworld 2001 due to problems with its control system. While no real details have been aired – including whether its a first or thirdperson game – hopes are still high that Retro, under the guidance of Miyamoto-san, will deliver.



Star Fox Adventures: Dinosaur Planet

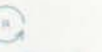
Rare's epic N64 title was on course for a 2001 release, when the decision was taken to move it over to GameCube. Since then, the adventure game has been given a makeover and the major elements altered to fit in with the *Star Fox* universe. Although the game's heritage is still evident in the construction of the gameworld, its graphical styling is quite splendid. If Rare can sort out some of the frame-rate problems of early demos – and not steal too many ideas from *Zelda* – it could have a winner on its hands.



Kirby's Tilt 'n' Tumble

Nintendo's first real evidence of the GBA-NGC link-up is this Kirby game in the vein of *Super Monkey Ball*. The GBA cartridge contains a tilt mechanism enabling you to control Kirby's actions onscreen (though surely the tilting screen will mean you can't actually see anything). When used as a GameCube controller in conjunction with the NGC *Kirby* game, Kirby is presented in all his 128bit glory, and when he falls off a platform he 'falls' onto the GBA screen where play continues.

PlayStation2



Tech-specs



CPU: Emotion Engine, 128bit, 294.912Mhz
Graphics processor: Graphics Synthesizer, 147.456Mhz
Other processors: Input Output Processor (IOP), Signal Processing Unit (SPU)
Main RAM: 32Mb RAM
Memory bandwidth: 3.2Gb/sec
Graphics RAM: 4Mb embedded on GS
Theoretical performance: 66m polygons/second
Estimated real performance: 20m polygons/second
Graphics functions: Built in trilinear mipmapping, single-pass antialiasing, zero cost alpha blending/texture modulation/per pixel fogging. Full screen and multipass antialiasing supported via sample code. T&L engine is completely programmable – programmers are encouraged to directly address the hardware rather than a software abstraction.
Sound RAM: 2Mb embedded on SPU
Audio performance: 48 channels, 0–48Khz, Dolby Digital 5.1
Storage: 4x4.7Gb DVD, 8Mb memory cards, optional hard disk (capacity unknown), potential for iLink and USB storage devices
Input/Output: Two game controller ports, two USB ports, iLink, AC-in, AV Multi-out, Digital Out
Networking: Slot for optional broadband modem, optional USB model from thirdparties
Notes: European and US models are built with a mixture of 0.25 and 0.18micron technology, and also differ from Japanese models by having embedded sound RAM and a built-in slot for hard drive/broadband instead of a PCMCIA slot.



Naturally, it's difficult to get excited about PlayStation2 when two other new consoles have just launched. But there's no getting away from the fact that the first 18 months of its existence has been tinged with disappointment. (It's a factor brought into stark relief by Xbox's launch line-up which includes the exalted *Halo*). There have simply been too few AAA titles to warrant a ringing endorsement of Sony's next-generation console.

But that's the heart of a gamer talking. In terms of mainstream penetration, Sony has done its job with painstaking efficiency. A 20 million global installed base and counting tells its own story. The real test, though, is not shifting units to the masses now, but ensuring that the hearts and minds of hardened gamers are not enticed over to Microsoft and Nintendo later. On a positive note, veteran thirdparty publishers, such as Konami, Sega and Capcom are coming through with quality titles. The year 2002 will surely be a tremendous one for Sony, let's just hope a 10/10 title is imminent.

Edge verdict

Sony's influence is all pervasive; the PS2 is eminently the machine to buy if you want the 'safe' option.

Xbox

Tech-specs



CPU: 733MHz Intel 32bit CPU
Graphics processor: 300MHz Nvidia iGPU
Other processors: 200MHz Nvidia MCPX
Main RAM: 64Mb unified memory
Memory bandwidth: 6.4Gb/sec
Graphics RAM: none (64Mb unified RAM)
Theoretical performance: 150m polygons/second
Estimated real performance: 50m polygons/second
Graphics functions: Hardware transform and lighting, full-screen antialiasing, variety of 3D effects, four simultaneous textures, texture compression
Sound RAM: none (64Mb unified RAM)
Audio performance: 256 2D channels, 64 3D channels, hardware 3D effects
Storage: 5x 4.7Gb DVD, 8Gb hard drive, 8Mb memory card
Input/Output: Four game controller ports, expansion port, proprietary A/V port
Networking: 10/100Mbps ethernet broadband enabled, optional 56Kbps modem
Notes: The Nvidia iGPU frees the CPU from the bulk of the 3D processing. Sound is handled by the MCPX. The hard disk is designed primarily as a 'scratch pad' to extend main memory rather than for longterm game installation.



UK publishers are treating Xbox cautiously, believing the entry price of £299 may prove too high to build a significant immediate user base. But the rumoured September release of the GameCube has to work in Microsoft's favour, and much of the success will depend on how easily a recession-hit public accept the snowstorm of hype that will inevitably surround the March 14 release. Either way, the machine's positive start in the US, in terms of both sell-through rate and reception from developers, is sure to influence international support.

In Japan there's something of a culture barrier to overcome and while games like *Dead Or Alive 3* and *Jet Set Radio Future* will undoubtedly go some way towards persuading the Japanese public of Microsoft's serious intent, the twin brands of Nintendo and PlayStation are formidable opponents. Microsoft's biggest weapon is the exclusive franchise, but rumours of *Shenmue* going multiformat isn't going to help its cause, and nor will ports of old Konami franchises, with or without the X suffix.

Edge verdict

Microsoft's Death Star has the potential for long life and prosperity. The choice for committed gamers.

GameCube

Tech-specs



CPU: IBM PowerPC: Gekko, 128bit, 405MHz
Graphics processor: Flipper 128bit, 202.5MHz
Main RAM: 24Mb
Graphics RAM: 16Mb
Memory bandwidth: 3.2Gb/sec
Theoretical performance: 12m polygons/second
Estimated real performance: 6-12m polygons/second
Graphics functions: fog, subpixel antialiasing, HW light x8, alpha blending, virtual texture design, multi-texture mapping/bump/environment mapping, mipmapping, bilinear filtering, realtime texture decompression (S3TC), 24bit colour
Sound RAM: 8Kb instruction RAM + 4Kb ROM, custom 16bit DSP
Audio performance: 64 channels, 48KHz
Storage and media type: 1.5Gb GameCube disk drive, 4Mb Digicard flash memory, 64Mb SD-Digicard adaptor
Input/Output: Four controller ports, two Digicard slots, one Analog AV output, one Digital AV output, high-speed parallel port
Networking: 56K modem and broadband ports
Notes: Not the most powerful machine on offer, but several developers think it's genuinely easy to work on. Nintendo has focused heavily on graphics functions to allow a seemingly surprise-free operating system. But only as long as you only want to develop games – the system obviously offers little flexibility when placed next to its adversaries.



Despite the machine's appearance, the eclectic launch line-up and Nintendo's dismal track record in Europe, this is the machine we all want. There are few dedicated gamers who can ignore the appeal of the Nintendo brand and all that it implies.

The success of GameCube's US launch shows that there's still a huge and loyal fanbase for Nintendo. But will it enjoy the same luxury in Europe now Sony's machine is at £199; now that shelves are bulging with big-name PS2 titles; once the all-powerful Xbox has sauntered in and hoovered up your remaining cash? But the biggest question is: will Nintendo change its attitude towards the European market? The hardcore have already turned their back on the UK highstreet, choosing instead to pay the price and import. But how long before even the most fervent Nintendo supporters tire of the lamentable release schedules and *laissez-faire* attitude towards PAL conversions?

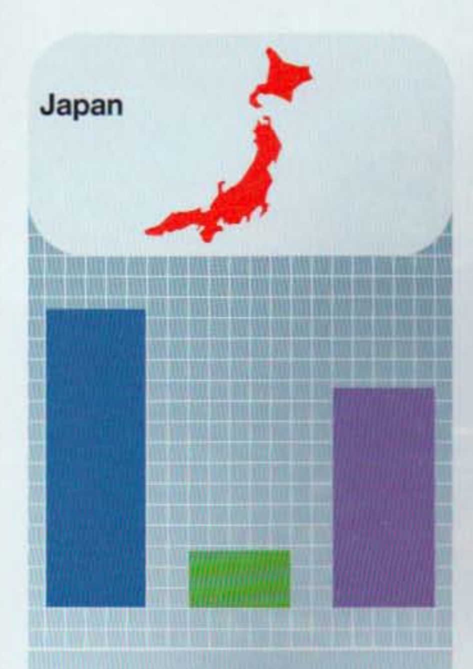
Edge wants GameCube to succeed. But in this part of the world, it's not a surefire thing any more.

Edge verdict

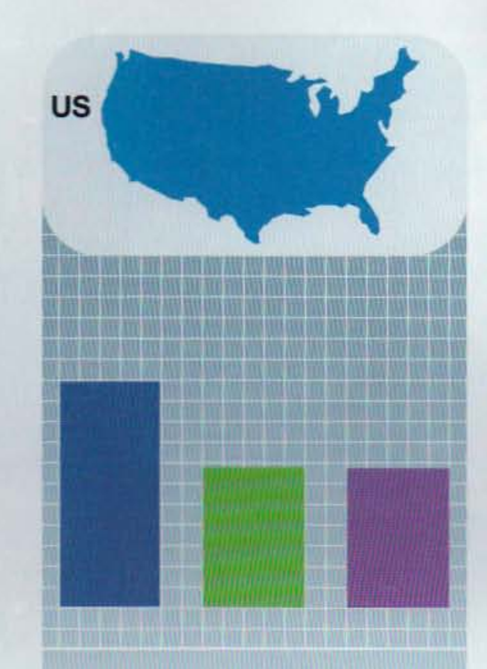
Vibrancy and invention; GameCube may be overlooked by the masses but will become the family favourite.

Territorial advantage

Videogame tastes have always differed from one country to another (although there's really no accounting for the popularity of *Jet de Go!* in Japan). More than ever before distinct battle lines are likely to be drawn across each territory during the next console war. With Nintendo disdaining Europe and an American heavyweight forcing its way into Japan, market penetration is likely to be very different in each part of the world. Here, then, is **Edge**'s assessment of the global picture over the next 12 months.



With over 7m units already installed, Sony has its feet comfortably under the tables of Japanese gamers. But there have been discouraging signs: *Final Fantasy X*, *inter alia*, has failed to shift the expected numbers. The PS2 is selling well (36,000 units sold in the week beginning November 12th alone) and a muted response to the GameCube's launch can't have harmed Sony but the latest news suggests that GameCube is gathering strength. Massive sales of *Pikmin* and *Smash Brothers DX* are positive signs, and with *Mario Sunshine* and *Zelda* on the way it seems likely that Nintendo will come a close second to Sony. Xbox may arrive too late for a nation known for its passion for miniaturisation.



As this month's news report attests (page 6) sales of both Xbox and GameCube have been very strong with both companies declaring initial victory, at least in terms of launch statistics. For American gamers the choice between consoles must be the hardest yet. All three major players are supporting its systems with large advertising campaigns and publicity tours. Nintendo still has amazing brand loyalty in the States and Microsoft already has its killer app in *Halo*. But once again, Sony's installed base is impressive standing at some 9m units. Ultimately the success of each console in the states will come down to one simple deciding factor: the strength and depth of the software.



Snubbed by Nintendo once again, European gamers may well have voted with their wallets by the time the GameCube is released in 2002. Interest in the Xbox is gathering pace and news of *Halo*'s excellence is sure to filter through to even the most casual gamer. When Microsoft's machine launches in Europe on March 14 it will be supported by a huge marketing push and the breadth and depth of software to sway early adopters. But the price could present a barrier for parents looking to upgrade their child's PSone. For them the PS2 and the Sony brand is the natural option at a respectable £199 price tag. Again, Sony's headstart (nearly 5m units installed) is unlikely to be eroded in a hurry.

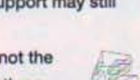
Future perfect

There have been some monumental moments in videogaming history: the day Al Alcorn pushed the first *Pong* machine into Andy Capp's Tavern; the Mega Drive/Super Nintendo war which defined the early '90s, Nintendo's decision to drop its partnership with Sony in 1991. But the four days spanning November 15 and November 18 2001 thrust videogaming into a new era. With Sony's PS2 already in 20 million homes across the world the launch of two new consoles effectively kicked off 'next generation' gaming. But while the three mega-corps fight it out for world dominance, humble gamers can expect some truly astounding software over the next few years.

There is no surprise that **Edge** expects Sony to dominate in every territory during 2003. But the real battle will be fought in the mid part of the decade. By 2005 the gaming landscape will be radically different, with online play and a broadband infrastructure supporting (hopefully) more richly textured multiplayer experiences. While Sony and Nintendo have broadband adaptors on the cards, Microsoft's commitment to online play out of the box sends a confident message to consumers, and the opposition.

Ken Kuturagi has already talked about PlayStation3 and Microsoft's Xbox has the raw power to sustain gamers for several years. However, Nintendo's vision is less distinct, relying, as always, on Miyamoto's creativity and continued brand loyalty, factors which may not be enough in the face of Sony and Microsoft's onslaught. But Nintendo can never be written off; its business model follows different rules to its competitors. Although strong thirdparty support may still be an issue, the Game Boy Advance and a *Pokémon*-style hit can never be ruled out.

Of course, there can be no forecast about the demise of a videogame console at this stage. This is not the place to look for alarmist predictions. But if **Edge** were to put its reputation on the line... oh, just buy all three.



Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary

Edge's PC is an 'WinPC' Intel 1.7Ghz/1 Gig RAM/GeForce 3, kindly provided by **iwantitnow.co.uk**

Videogames on the **Edge**

This month's unanimous choices...

Halo: Combat Evolved

In multiplayer mode *Halo* lets players kill each other using stealth and subtlety. Of course, there's always the option of running people over using the Warthog.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Halo: Combat Evolved

Storming an occupied Warthog is for those with more bravery than brains. But an unpredictable leaping mad-man can be more terrifying than any weapon.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Halo: Combat Evolved

While the other foolhardy players fight it out face-to-face, one **Edge** staffer picks-off the fools with a sniper rifle. Camping? He may as well have a sleeping bag.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Halo: Combat Evolved

The tank is a formidable force with both a machine gun and powerful shells. But it doesn't stop certain players from hoarding them in ridiculous locations.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Cinematic grandeur

Videogames, remember what you are

While compiling the '**Edge** Special', **Edge** had the pleasure of scything through eight years of videogaming, re-reading features illustrating fads, watching brief trends blossom and die. One, detailed over the course of the earlier issues, was the interactive movie; the informal label given to the act of splicing together related segments of FMV, providing the player with a Y-branching route through them, and calling it a videogame. Some fashion.

But it never really went away, truth be told. Everyone wants to be a movie star, and developers have striven since vector cabinets to put them in one particular universe. *Rogue Leader*, easily the closest 'Star Wars' fans have ever come to being inside the 20-year-old trilogy, benefits from that premise in terms of sales, but suffers for it as a game. The overbearing legacy of the film means missions have heavy expectation hanging over them; twisting cables around AT-ATs might look like fun in 'The Empire Strikes Back', but it doesn't prove so exciting in translation.

Several months ago, *Max Payne* illustrated the root of problem. Film producers have the benefit of hindsight and handsomely paid Editors, whereas games have to accept players' interaction and generate content on the fly. That means you're not living the film, but living the making of the film, an entirely different – and much less rewarding – thing. *Metal Gear Solid 2* circumvents the problem by using lengthy sections of non-interactive cinematography to generate its story. And that brings us very, very close to the *Voyeur/Night Trap* dynamic of the early '90s: brief moments of player interaction punctuated by video tedium.

But gaming *can* learn from film; bullet points are easy to think up. Realistic dialogue and appropriate delivery is crucial if a game involves verbal interaction. Plots, if they're necessary, should be as considered as the code that renders them. Audio should enhance the experience, not drown it out, or constantly remind the player that they're merely consuming entertainment. There are many more, but the real point is this: while gaming can learn from film, it should stop wanting to *be* film. Only then will it realise its potential to be something more.



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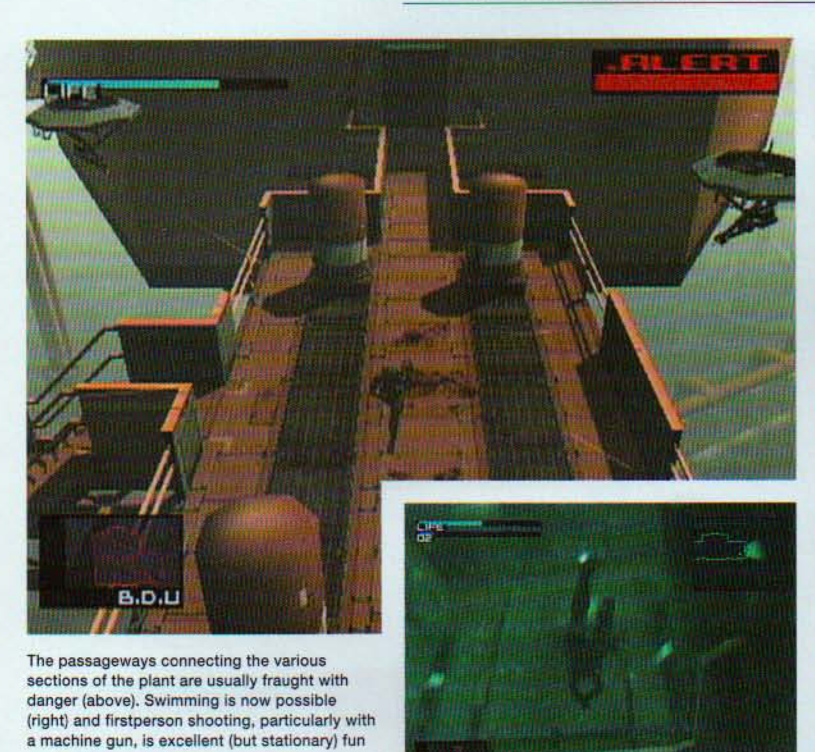




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Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£38)** Release: **Out now (Japan), February 2 (UK)**



The passageways connecting the various sections of the plant are usually fraught with danger (above). Swimming is now possible (right) and firstperson shooting, particularly with a machine gun, is excellent (but stationary) fun





Preparation is key. Proper observation of your surroundings makes life a lot easier. Here, a guard using binoculars at the top of a tower is keeping an eye on an outdoor section – an easy job for the sniper rifle although a well-judged tranquiliser dart also works. As in *MGS1*, several approaches are possible when dealing with situations – your options are normally only limited by your espionage skills and, frankly, your intelligence

For the first 13-odd minutes of *MGS2*, you don't get to use the DualShock2. You can zoom in on the cut-scenes by pressing R1 and move the camera around with the right analogue stick but you have no *real* involvement – you're just a passenger.

Unsurprisingly, then, *Sons of Liberty* begins as it intends to go on, displaying the kind of reliance on cut-scenes that is only rivalled – though certainly not beaten – by its 32bit predecessor. If you didn't enjoy them in *Metal Gear Solid* you're not likely to tolerate them here, either, particularly when their intrusion appears more determined second time around. Yet that doesn't mean you can't appreciate their quality – *MGS2* offers some of the most convincing cinematic sequences seen in a videogame, a reflection of Hideo Kojima's undeniable flair for capturing action on camera.

At times MGS2 feels as though it would be much happier being a film, yet that doesn't stop it being a remarkably rewarding videogame

When the moment eventually comes, the action is comfortingly familiar. There are a couple of new elements (hanging off ledges, looking around corners and evasive somersaults, for instance) as well as revised aspects (swimming, shooting in firstperson mode), but on the whole your character does everything *MGS1* veterans would expect. And a little bit more. As with *Halo*, the attraction is in finding these out yourself and in **Edge**'s experience ignoring most of the game's hints (the many patronising Codec messages from your commanding officer) and relying on your intelligence instead makes this a significantly better game.

MGS2 is all about detail – from the persuasive nature of the game's physical modelling (early examples include shooting leaves off plants, magazines off racks or bottles from behind the bar) to the various in-jokes (the Vulcan Raven toy or boxes full of *ZOE* copies lying around the place) or the way the team has yet again fully exploited the capabilities of the controller (pressure-sensitive functionality is the main difference here – holding/choking soldiers, speed of leaning round a corner, 'easing off' the trigger, etc) the level of attention that has gone into this is staggering. For the most part it's as consistent an environment (graphically and psychologically) as that of, say, *Halo* or *GoldenEye* (or indeed, *MGS1*), and one that is supported by an immensely atmospheric audio score (both FX and, particularly, music).

This detail carries through to other areas. The developer has clearly really considered the dynamic of the gameplay, adding subtle sub-levels of stealth complexity or designing the environment to cover all conceivable camera angle eventualities so as to make navigation through them as painless as possible. There are issues – disorientation can occur at times from camera shifts and control can occasionally feel a little clumsy – although anyone playing *MGS2* correctly shouldn't find these too obstructive.

And this is crucial. There is little to no point trying to rush through this game – you'll not only die frequently but also miss out on rewards (neutralised guards tend not to 'hand out' items if you're continually restarting sections) – you might as well play *Tetris* without bothering to rotate the blocks. **Edge** has long maintained that playing

Previously in E86/E88/E93









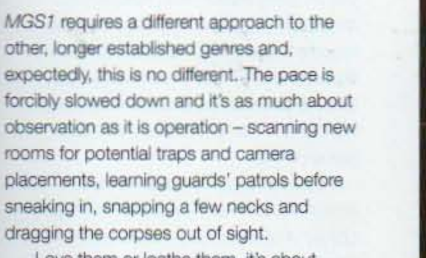




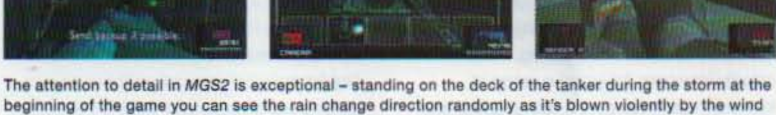














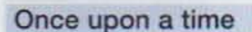


The attention to detail in *MGS2* is exceptional – standing on the deck of the tanker during the storm at the beginning of the game you can see the rain change direction randomly as it's blown violently by the wind

MGS1 requires a different approach to the other, longer established genres and, expectedly, this is no different. The pace is forcibly slowed down and it's as much about observation as it is operation – scanning new rooms for potential traps and camera placements, learning guards' patrols before sneaking in, snapping a few necks and dragging the corpses out of sight.

Love them or loathe them, it's about cut-scenes, too. It's the overall experience, rather than the game's various components, that counts. Admittedly, at times *MGS2* feels as though it would be much happier being a film, yet that doesn't stop it being a remarkably rewarding stealth-based videogame for the most part. And a decidedly distinctive affair to boot.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



Once upon a time

Sons Of Liberty begins on a tanker which Snake infiltrates in search of the military's latest development – Metal Gear Ray. Things get complicated and proceed onto a sizeable marine decontamination plant (which offers a hub-like arrangement) where a group of terrorists is holding the US president hostage. Then the plot twists begin. You can see most of these coming hours before they eventually turn up but occasionally one catches you off guard. By videogame standards, it's gripping stuff.

Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogu

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **LucasArts** Developer: **Factor 5** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US)**

Rogue Leader has been the beneficiary of an exceptional degree of hype. The arrival of a videogame that boasts an unprecedented sense of movie-like immersion into the 'Star Wars' universe, on Nintendo hardware, is coincident with the coming of age of America's 'Star Wars' and Nintendo generations. It's based on the original trilogy, not the much-maligned prequel, and it's arrived just in time to accompany the launch of Nintendo's most anticipated piece of hardware. Unsurprisingly, the result has been an enthusiastic brouhaha characterised by overinflated expectations, which makes judging the real merits of the game slightly difficult.

Frankly, **Edge** had naively hoped that slowdown and crash bugs would be banished with the demise of the 32bit era









While there are many moments of ingenuity, such as the variation of certain missions at different times, it's a shame that they don't gel as well as they should

Initial impressions are good. Visually and aurally, the game is the most accurate interactive recreation of the movies yet. Supporting Dolby's Pro Logic II surround sound, and featuring voice acting by the original Wedge, Denis Lawson, as well as dialogue excerpts culled from the film, Factor 5 have taken considerable effort to ensure that the sound is accurate down to the minutiae of every last TIE Fighter wail.

The beautifully rendered environments are translated from celluloid with few, if any, imperfections, and the ten core missions position players firmly in some of the movie's most portentous moments; the Battle of Endor, the Death Star trench run above Yavin, and of course, the Rebel flight from Hoth. They also put players in the cockpits of a wide array of starfighters from the Bespin Cloud Car and Millennium Falcon to the more familiar X-Wing and Y-Wing.

However, this jaw-dropping evocation of Force-inspired heroics masks some fairly serious flaws. Apart from the authenticity of the experience, the game offers very little to distinguish itself from predecessors such as the original *Rogue Squadron*, and the recent *Star Fighter*. What's worse, the delicately balanced learning curve to be found in the likes of *TIE Fighter* has been completely thrown out. The convoluted structure of most missions and an arbitrary difficulty level contribute to a piecemeal pacing, which actually interrupts the glorious sense of immersion achieved by first rate graphics and superlative sound effects. And frankly, **Edge** had naively hoped that slowdown and crash bugs would be banished with the demise of the 32bit era.



Rogue Leader is visually breathtaking throughout, owing to some beautiful shadowing effects, but at what cost? During certain moments, too much detail results in a juddering framerate, which is just unforgivable

Most missions are composed of successive objectives that are narrowly defined, limiting the player's self-expression; protecting NPC craft without any damage indicators and dodging kamikaze TIEs proves frustrating and limiting in practice. An added layer of convolution is provided by the inclusion of rudimentary wingmen, and the single flaw in the design of the GameCube controller; the Z-trigger simply proves almost unusable to roll your craft if your hands are of any size approaching average.

Finally, there is the targeting computer. While a nice idea, it too proves unworkable during gameplay. Key mission objectives are highlighted when you pull up the computer, guiding you towards your goal, but should you be using the far more satisfactory thirdperson view, the targeting computer requires a jolting leap into the in-cockpit firstperson view. It also encourages rote learning since its use is proscribed if you want to win the high scores that unlock hidden extras.

It certainly isn't the fault of Factor 5 that expectations should be so high for *Rogue Leader* and given the constraints of a short development cycle in order to meet the US hardware launch date, the developer can hardly be blamed for resurrecting the game mechanics of its previous titles. Nevertheless, it is disappointing to find that the game is merely distinguished – and then only because the licence provides some compensation for a handful of technical flaws and a number of sloppy game mechanics.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Leader

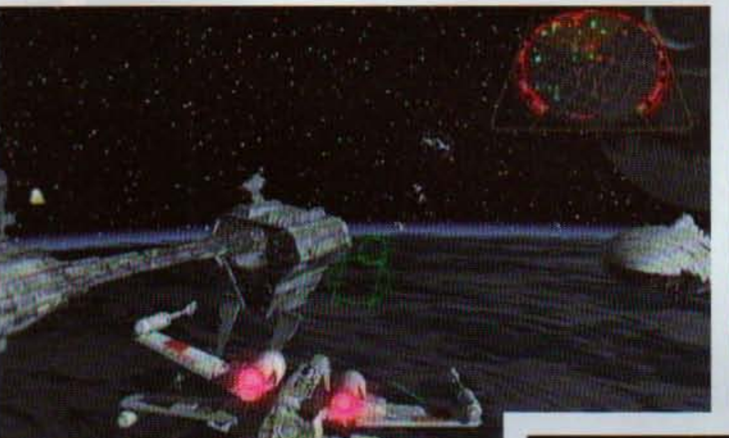
Previously in E103













The range of environments is satisfyingly diverse, from the icy wastes of Hoth to the cloud cityscape of Bespin, and a few areas in between









Though it lends an undeniable air of authenticity, strict adherence to the flow of the movie trilogy results in a sporadic pacing and, consequently, a patchy learning curve. Nevertheless, those levels that are straight from the canon are most engaging

Rebel secrets

As with Factor 5's previous 'Star Wars' titles, *Rogue Leader* conceals an abundance of hidden extras. Additional craft can be liberated during missions, power-ups are scattered throughout environments, and high scores are rewarded with extra vehicles, audio commentaries, and unlockable missions. It's just a bit of a shame that these extra missions demonstrate a greater degree of variety and creativity than a lot of those that are initially available. Perhaps the game could have benefited from a greater willingness to experiment with mission structure, though no doubt this would have elongated the development process.

Dead Or Alive 3

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Tecmo (Team Ninja)** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US), March 14 (UK)**







Fights can move slickly from one arena to another, thanks to the miracle of gravity. Soon after the scene above, Kasumi and Helana will find themselves fighting on a tiled rooftop



The final boss is covered in blurry slow-motion effects. He's also something of an irritating anti-climax, defeating you with range weaponry and simple attacks

Dead Or Alive is beautiful. Not because of the girls; not because of the trails in the snow; not because of the way the neon sign fizzes as your opponent's body falls past it. *Dead Or Alive* is beautiful because it's balanced in such a way to make graceful, balletic combat immediate, and to make fighting perfection seem simultaneously so attainable yet so, so far away.

Initially, it seems to come from luck. Combos and special moves arise from button sequences rather than joypad sweeps – rapid, rhythmic sequences of kicks and punches – and that means beginners will find some joy right from the very start. In twoplayer, it lessens the gap between the veteran and the novice. Button bashing won't always achieve spectacular results, but provides enough of an impetus for a good player to always be wary of a weaker one. It only takes one fortunate combo to change a match. Patience, control, and observation are as crucial as timing and memory.

Control is smart and instinctive. Left and right on the D-pad controls the fighter's movement towards or away from their opponent. Up and down jump and crouch, or, if they're double tapped, allow the player to circle their foe. There are only three buttons: one for kick, one for punch, and another labelled 'free', which serves as block, hold, and counter, and can also be used in combination with the other two for more complex moves. The extra buttons the Xbox controller provides are mapped to these combinations, but the point is that there's no need to use them. Relying on the extraneous 'throw' button, which emulates pressing punch and free together, works well enough, but distracts from the purity of the system and thus from the game as a whole.

Story mode can be completed in six or seven minutes per character, and even beginners may want to set the AI to a more challenging degree

Story mode can be completed in six or seven minutes per character on the default difficulty setting, and even beginners may want to set the computer AI to a more challenging degree. Still, while the 16 end-game movies are attractive, completing the game isn't really worth sweating over. The thrill here comes from practising the art of fighting, whichever style you choose: karate involves mastering wildly different rhythms to the rolling drunken fighting. Rewards for repeated triumph prove to be minimal, with only a handful of hidden costumes making their presence known to **Edge**, though more are promised for the Japanese version which may well be made available as a hard-disk update to the US release.

A bigger and much less patchable

Previously in E99/E103





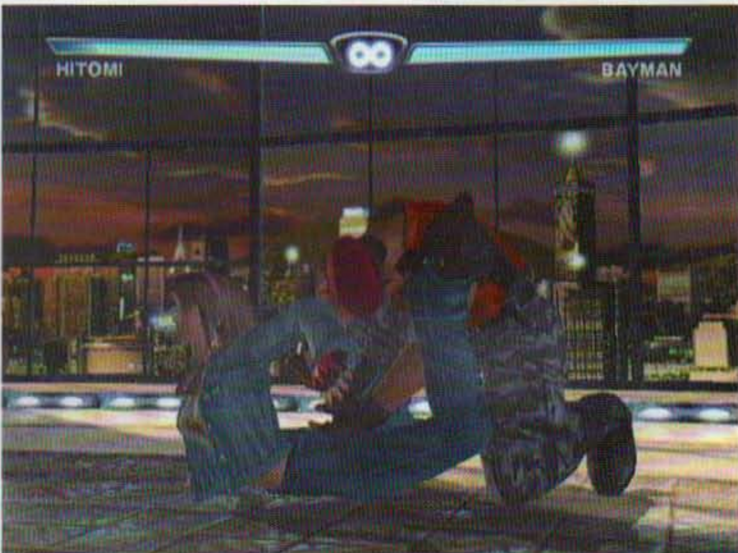






The sub-aqua aquarium level fails to have the calming effect that being surrounded by fish is meant to induce, but looks stunning. Other levels are less dramatic, but there are constants: a kick in the face is never pleasant





Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *Dead Or Alive 3* is the way the characters' bodies lock neatly together during throws and holds. It's not easy to appreciate it when you're caught like this, though

concern is with the D-pad. It's not as much of a problem as previously imagined, since its cylindrical nature proves surprisingly stiff and responsive, but the (presumably) stylistically-instigated 'X' is still weaker than a standard cross formation, and veteran fighters will cry for an arcade stick. But then veteran fighters always do. It's a show-off thing.

And that serves as a neat enough description for the game itself. Show-off because it's possible to pull off jaw-dropping hold, throws, and combination attacks within only a few minutes of studying the move lists. Show-off because experienced fighters can pull off even more dazzling displays, demonstrate lightning fast combat ballet, make the screen shake with power. Show-off because, of all the games currently available for the Xbox, this is the one that'll convince onlookers that Microsoft's juggernaut really is visually punching its weight.

But underneath the aesthetics, while there's little doubt that those with *Dead Or Alive 2* on Dreamcast or PlayStation2 will enjoy the follow-up, it doesn't provide any particular incentive to purchase. It's fine, spectacular, stunning, in a thoroughly ordinary fashion. It thrills, but will leave those who've previously visited the series contented rather than elated. Newcomers, on the other hand, will find the rhythmic joy as unconfined as ever.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Tag hour



As well as the story mode, *Dead Or Alive 3* provides a series of other challenges for the player to work through. Survival mode and Time Attack are self-explanatory and entertaining enough, but the real fun comes with the returning Tag Battle mode, which brings a new level of tactical depth to the combat. While a character is out of the ring their health recharges, which means last-second tags can prove invaluable, especially since two-person teams can execute combination holds and throws which are as damaging as they are spectacular.

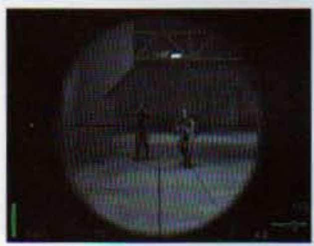
Return To Castle Wolfenstein

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **id** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**









It's in the range of weapon options that *RTCW* excels. In most missions, both close-up silenced Sten-gun work and sniper rifle fire are possible

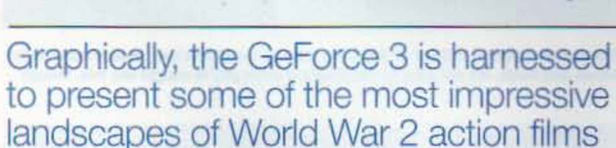
More than anything else, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* should be important. The original *Wolfenstein* was, more so than its younger brother *Doom*, the game which offered a glance of the future in PC terms.

id – a developer with a string of entertaining 2D action games to its name, and which boasted the native-language-is-assembly mind of John Carmack – worked out a way to make the third dimension interact with the speed of the traditional second. *Wolfenstein* was a unique high-speed 3D action game. Massively successful in its own terms, and acting as the initial probing assault to the complete domination of *Doom*, it is *important*. As important as *Mario*. As important as *Zelda* or *Metal Gear Solid* or any of its peers in innovation. *Wolfenstein* begat *everything*.

So why should the return to the zero hour of PC 3D action be so ordinary?

And ordinary it is. Which, for the devotee of pure entertainment, is no bad thing. If the PC is capable of anything it's of creating a string of brilliant FPS games. Looking ahead to the next 12 months, it's fair to say the PC will hold more firstperson games than any other format – meaning the competition is stronger. As good as *RTCW* is, the thoughts it provokes are simple, little things: a slice better than *Star Trek: Elite Force*, similar stealth elements to *No-one Lives Forever*, just about as many entertaining moments as *Aliens Versus Predator 2*. Which is the real problem: there's literally nothing here that you haven't experienced before.

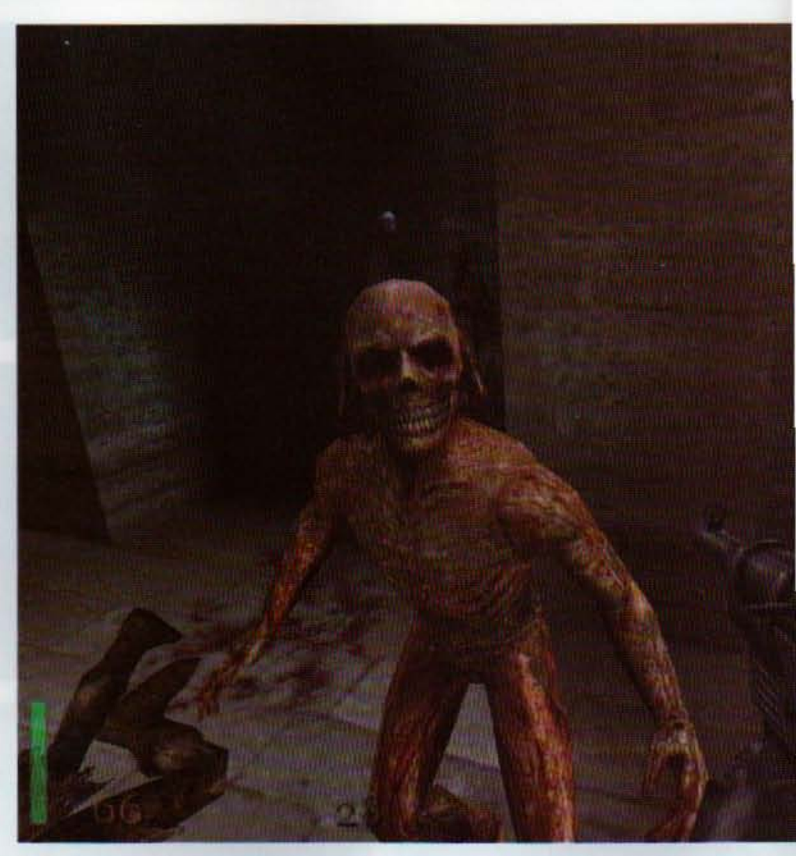
Which, when it works, is an undeniable strength – careful observers might draw a line between the inching improvements of eastern-school beat 'em ups and the PC shooter, were it not for games as varied as



Graphically, the GeForce 3 is harnessed to present some of the most impressive landscapes of World War 2 action films

Deus Ex and *Flashpoint* proving the form can be twisted into wonderful new shapes.

The lessons taught by *Half-Life*, of the vast majority of plot elements happening in-engine without breaking control, is followed in *RTCW*, leading to a virtually seamless atmosphere. Graphically, the GeForce 3 is harnessed to present some of the most impressive landscapes of WW2 action films –



Rather than concentrating on presenting an action game purely based around the historical truths of the Third Reich, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* enters the world of Nazi Occult Conspiracy theories. Hence this

chateaux, dams, churches – and the standards of the genre – underground science bases, catacombs – to beautiful effect. Character design is striking, as in the leather jumpsuit-clad dominatrixes or the gothic flamethrower troops. A wide weapon set allows a variety of approaches, with each player favouring a selection of scopes and sights. The silenced Sten-gun or the chain-gun analogue of the Venom Gun? The choice really is yours. Even at its most distracted, *RTCW* is a far greater experience than the crippled *Red Faction*.

But *RTCW* shares all the weaknesses of the form too. Enemy AI is capable of both impressive tactics (falling back to lay ambushes), and shellshocked idiocy (standing still watching their Reich-brother's head explode with a bullet to the cranium). Head-shots are overly stressed, meaning reaction shots to the target area are favoured above any tactics.

Rather than introducing a new enemy sort with higher characteristics, identical characters statistics are boosted, making it impossible to predict the accurate effects of your actions on them. Despite the expansive outdoor terrain model allowed by the use of the Quake Team Arena Engine, the construction of the levels is purely linear – not a bad thing in itself, except when the actual way to progress becomes occasionally confusing. And, yes, there are moments where to progress efficiently you have to quick-save, enter a room, locate the baddies, and then replay with the advantage of your precognisant knowledge.

Return To Castle Wolfenstein embodies the pure-PC shooter, acting both as its paragon and its scapegoat. Both fans and detractors of the genre will find much to enthuse about here, missing the point that it's not the genre that's the problem, but rather the lack of anything revelatory.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Dropship

Previously in E86/E90/E102






The super-science of the mythical Reich is explored to provide suitable opponents. With trips to experimental jet-fighter stations, *RTCW* plays fast and loose with history





Team play

Despite the game's hype as being from id, the Texas team only ever really acted as producer; Grey Matter (previously Xatrix, creators of *Kingpin*) took duties on the singleplayer game while the multiplayer duties were looked after by Nerve. A *Team Fortress*-styled class-based structure, the players fight in Allies versus Axis teams. The fact the multiplayer is centred so much on teamplay is perhaps appropriate given the amount of teamplay id has relied upon to create the game, a trend it will continue with *Quake 4*, to be developed by Raven.




As hinted in the opening movie, *RTCW* sees a return to the relatively out-of-fashion Big Boss structure, with three sizeable opponents strewn throughout the game. Sadly, don't expect to see the Cybernetic Hitler of the first game to show its moustachioed face

Dropship

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house (Team Camden)** Price: **£40** Release: **January 18**

Ever since it became one of the first European-developed titles announced by Sony for PlayStation2, *Dropship* has been an intriguing prospect. Post-PlayStation, aerial combat games have had difficulty making much of an impression on the massmarket, with standout successes boasting either 24-carat licences, such as *Rogue Leader*, or a rare emphasis on fun and simple, effective control, such as *Starfox 64*. Neither deviated from the essential components of airborne action, but each managed to dress it up in suitably distinctive shades and shapes.

Instead of making a virtue of the potential of its near-future setting, the game settles for a crass revisitation of Reagan-era preoccupations

Dropship looked a good bet to join their ranks. The 2050 date-stamp would free it up from standard-issue air combat scenarios while the usual drab and dusty military palette, and the expansive playing fields promised an enhanced sense of freedom. Finally, there was the game's star class of craft, the *Dropship* – part-fighter plane, part-hovercraft. If all these aspects had been successfully implemented with a coherent and engaging backstory, Team Camden's effort would have had every chance of reviving the fortunes of the airborne shooter.

It's a pity, then, given the success with which *Dropship*'s gameplay does the air combat perennials – the homing missiles and the mounted guns, the wingmen providing support and the ground forces in need of protection, the barracks waiting to be blown to bits – that the world in which they take place is so creatively stale. Instead of making a virtue of the imaginative potential of its near-future setting, the game settles for a crass revisitation of Reagan-era preoccupations, complete with evil Arab warlords, South American drug barons and Chinese commanders whom the player takes on in the name of the United Peace Force (the game's fictional successor to NATO and the UN) – all of which sits uneasily with the cockpit chat lifted straight from 'Star Wars' and the unconvincing, European co-production air to the voice acting.

Ethical issues aside, blowing stuff up in *Dropship* can be great fun. The game's campaigns are subdivided into missions, which in turn are typically constructed from a selection of staggered tasks ranging from basic dogfighting duties to the destruction of enemy defences and installations, via troop and equipment transportation and protection. Getting somewhat comfortable with switching between the dropships' supersonic flight mode and their precise but ponderous hover controls (used primarily for picking up and dropping off) is a necessity for completing missions efficiently, but it's still a curious system and a difficult one to love.

The firepower at your disposal is easier to be enthusiastic about – hold down the circle button after launching a rocket, for example, and the camera follows the missile's trajectory right up to its impact. Elsewhere, such thrills are as likely to come at the wheel or mounted gun of one of the supporting cast of playable land vehicles; driving sections in tanks and ATVs are simple but suitably tense, and passages of play in which you man the cannons of a moving vehicle have the immediacy of vintage light-gun action. Although the game attempts to include opportunities for RTS-style decision making, the way combat sections are tightly yoked to predetermined events undermines the sense that planning might be a better bet than simply blasting everything in sight.

In truth, the strategy influence is most evident in *Dropship*'s military aesthetic, where expanses of snow, sand or parched soil are only broken up by generic, but nicely modelled, enemy outposts. The price of the epic draw distance and scope for off-piste flightpaths is the dull, repetitive nature of all the game's miles of terrain – little wonder, then, that the rolling green hills and fiery skies of the Colombian jungle, scene of the second campaign, linger longest in the memory.









Some of *Dropship*'s most gratifying moments recall the simple pleasures of such ground-bound blasters as *Body Harvest* or *Virtua Cop 2*



In hover mode, the DualShock2's shoulder buttons are used to ascend and descend; while flying, they perform a strafing role. Switching between the modes is a simple matter of a double button press

Previously in E84/E90/E99




A highlight is the success of the air-to-air combat scenarios. It's just a shame the landscapes are so dull





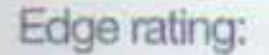



The absence of a system of lives or mid-mission continues seems a missed opportunity, especially when your failure is a consequence of nothing but getting the controls confused in the heat of battle



Most of *Dropship*'s action and environments unfold smoothly (especially when the PAL 60Hz option is activated), but sudden attacks of slowdown sometimes mar its showpiece explosions

The elegant arcs of rocket traces, subtle heat hazes and shards of sunlight with which the action is embellished go a long way towards compensating for the predictability of the landscape, but, as is so often the case, they can only truly be savoured in replay mode. And when all's said and done, that's what *Dropship* feels like: a polished but uninspired action replay of bygone blasting experiences. It's no template for the future of flight combat action, then, but should at least see shoot 'em up thrillseekers through the weekend in style.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Bad taste

Dropship's planned winter 2001 release date slipped because Sony elected to alter a bombing mission set in Afghanistan in light of the aftermath of September 11th, but from the moment you're briefed on a terrorist's desert hideout in the opening Libyan campaign through to a subsequent showdown in Kazakhstan, the game may still leave a bad taste in the mouth. The fact that the scenarios set in the future also echo present-day conflicts may have been intended as an indicator of maturity and realism, but now simply looks juvenile and grossly reductive. Giant bugs would have been a safer bet

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Neversoft** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E99**









Complete enough challenges in two consecutive stages and the skate competition opens up. A bronze medal is needed to move to the next area



Custom clothing

The skater editor is an entertaining diversion. While skills can be increased by collecting tokens on the streets, it is here that your flair for creativity really comes out. From head to toe nearly every detail of your chosen character can be altered, including facial hair and shade style. The addition of spandex hot pants and butch moustache gave **Edge** the opportunity to create a passable facsimile of its art editor.







The controls, tricks and camera have been improved to offer the best extreme sports game to date. A balance metre has been added so the player can gauge stability on those particularly tricky nosegrinds

There's nothing in gaming which quite manages to capture the thrill of racking up a ridiculous 500,000-plus point combo in one of Neversoft's *Tony Hawk's* games. The sheer fluidity of moving from a nosegrind to a tailslide then pulling off a 720 melon over an outrageous gap between buildings before landing back into a manual to continue the move hasn't been bettered by any other extreme sports title. The original *Tony Hawk's* provided the template which has been refined with every iteration.

So it's business as usual in the *Tony Hawk's* universe where any hint of angularity indicates a grind opportunity. Clothes lines, fountains, flower-beds, even helicopter blades, are all fair game for an intrepid boarder. The tricklist has been expanded and the environments are more expansive than previous versions. The Foundry level sets the tone for the rest of the game. Larger and more intricate than previous openings, it still provides a gentle introduction for beginners.

Structurally the game is almost identical to what has gone before. Nine challenges are set for each level consisting of simple point score challenges to performing tricks in specific locations. Tokens must be collected (which are placed in increasingly hard to reach locations) and most levels have a novelty 'event' which encourages exploration. Take to the streets of Los Angeles, for instance, and an earthquake can be triggered by grinding certain rails. The Cruise Ship in particular offers a wonderfully imaginative environment to showcase your skills.

It is disappointing, however, that visually things have improved only marginally from PSone editions. While draw distance is greater and scenery tearing is less evident, textures are bland and detail absent and, although this does not detract from the overall experience, in comparison with other second-generation PS2 titles *THPS3* looks uninspiring. The skaters, traffic, pedestrians and secondary characters also lack definition.

Fans of the series will lap up this familiar entertainment. The controls are wonderful and the extras, including the much improved skate park editor and a fourplayer network option, add to an enticing package. But it's difficult to get excited about a game which is fundamentally the same as those which have gone before. Unfortunately, the move to next-generation hardware has failed to engender any true inspiration.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Shin Sangokumusou 2 (Dynasty Warriors 3)

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Koei** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£38)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q1 2002 (UK)**

A powerful sense of déjà vu is likely to slay the expectations of *Dynasty Warriors 2* (reviewed in **E**90) owners who approach this latest sequel hoping for as significant a shift in style as the one that distinguishes the first from the second *Dynasty* title. True, the characters are more flamboyant, the encounters arguably more dynamic and the action certainly more fluid – possibly swifter, too – but there isn't much in *Shin Sangokumusou 2* to differentiate it from its prequel – even some of the music is identical. Which, seeing as *Dynasty Warriors 2* proved surprisingly compelling, is only really a dilemma for those who already possess a copy of Koei's PS2 slash 'em up.

Of course there are additions. More stages and characters (around 20 and 40, respectively) are to be expected, as is the increased graphical detail. Perhaps less so – though just as welcome – is the ability to trample enemy troops with elephants. However, a more significant inclusion is the handful of modes that join the main Musou (campaign) option: Challenge offers survival and time trial (100 enemies in the shortest amount of time) options but, critically, there's also a twoplayer game, conspicuously missing from the game's prequel (see box).

Other than that, the mechanics remain very much the same. There is a noticeable (and worthy) intrusion of action RPG elements relating mainly to items that can be found along your battling and later equipped, and you can now exercise a certain amount of control over your bodyguards by issuing limited commands mid-conflict but otherwise it's business as usual: pick your character and engage in a series of epic encounters against hundreds of opponents; fight valiantly; ensure your health bar never gets empty and rush around the vast environments to aid fellow war generals in need of assistance.

It is repetitive – extremely so, in fact. But even after you've spent the best part of an hour continuously engaging in an admittedly near-identical sequence of button presses, striking down your 1500th opponent is as fulfilling as the first – the experience remains strikingly compulsive. Whether it's an experience *Dynasty Warriors 2* players will consider worth another £40 is highly debatable, however. Then again, the primal appeal of a one-man army should never be underestimated.

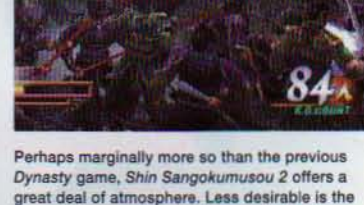
Edge rating: Seven out of ten











Perhaps marginally more so than the previous *Dynasty* game, *Shin Sangokumusou 2* offers a great deal of atmosphere. Less desirable is the draw distance which is still absurdly short, particularly when fighter numbers get very high



Combos are now more prominent, happily strengthening the overall arcade feel. The sense of urgency when rushing to help an ally in trouble somewhere else on the map thankfully remains strongly conveyed



Double-edged sword

The twoplayer option, noticeably absent from *Dynasty Warriors 2*, has managed an appearance in this sequel. Playing either cooperatively or at opposite ends of the good/evil scale, two can engage in rather entertaining bouts. Occasionally, slowdown does make itself known although more significant is how restrictive the view can prove, given that the camera is just that little bit too close to the action. An iLink option might have been a good move.

Smash Brothers DX

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **HAL Laboratories** Price: **¥6,800 (£38)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**99

In March '99, **Edge** reviewed *All-Star Dai Rantou Smash Brothers*, the N64 precursor to the GameCube's *Smash Brothers DX*. "*Smash Brothers* is a novel concept executed with considerable flair in places," ran the closing paragraph "Yet it falls far short of Nintendo's grand standards".

Thus **Edge** approaches the sequel with some trepidation, not least because the Net is on fire with tales of the game's second coming; it's being hailed like the resurrection. *This* is proof of a return to form for Nintendo. *This* is the game to sell the GameCube. Wrong. *This* is an enjoyable rehash of an entertaining game. It's fun, but it's not evolution; it's reproduction.

Smash Brothers' closest relative is still Capcom's *Power Stone* series, despite HAL shying from taking the series into 3D, a disappointment perhaps born from trust in consumer stoicism. Despite the interactive backgrounds and impressive lighting, the levels/ladders environments remain pure Game & Watch. The pattern is just as relentless: kick, punch, and one-button specials, level after level after level.

There is no pacing in *Smash Brothers*. It's all frantic, all the time, and while there are numerous difficulty levels offering increasingly sharp AI, honing your skills against the computer becomes tiresome. Part of this comes from the blocking method, which, given the frantic nature of the game and how little time you're given to react, is near redundant. Random victories also detract because there's less pleasure in victory when you know it's not skill that's acquired it.

Still, if there are question marks over the subtlety of strategy, there are none over the depth of content. Backdrops reference character history, provide in-jokes for Nintendo fans and colourful dioramas for everyone else. Sub-games compliment the combat with puzzling diversion, and the adventure mode turns the game, briefly, into a spectacular 2D platformer.

But it's not enough to change the core. *Smash Brothers* is a beautiful, fun game with near-infinite option-screen-based depth and wonderful pick-up-and-play comedy, but it's riddled with the problems of its predecessor. It's breathless, and scrappy, and ultimately monotonous. And, as you'd expect given NCL's safety-first static evolution, it's still only adequate. It still falls far short of Nintendo's grand standards.

Edge rating: Six out of ten





Seal of approval

Characters and arenas unlock as the player progresses through the game, but the focus of the reward system is the trophy room. Win bonus rounds during the main game and you're rewarded with gold coins. Coins can be spent in a *Shenmue*-style toy machine that contains hundreds of different character and object models – the trophies – each of which can be examined at length on a collection screen. Spending more coins per try increases the chance of returning an unfound figurine, but adventurous combatants will also find them during the game itself.







Pokéballs appear randomly, and when thrown produce Pokémon which attack your foes. There are an impressive range of different creatures available, just as there are a staggering amount of collectables: those who insist on catching 'em all will have to spend quite a while in pursuit







Battle Realms

Format: **PC** Publisher: **UbiSoft** Developer: **Liquid Entertainment** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**









Battle Realms' fog of war (the turquoise clouds) is quite severe, and means tracking down that final undefeated clan member proves irksome







Battle Realms is graphically accomplished, with realistically rippling water, and various environmental effects. You can zoom in on the action sightly, though this feature is accessible only via a mouse wheel

The story so far: Ed Del Castillo produced *Command & Conquer*, and *Command & Conquer* produced the tank rush. *Command & Conquer*, being the game that popularised realtime strategy, also produced a thousand near-identical clones of itself. Some were licensed sequels; some were just rip-offs; all took the tank rush and made it their own. Ed Del Castillo didn't like the tank rush much, so he went off and produced Liquid Entertainment, and they produced a new game.

The game is *Battle Realms*. The tank rush is the cancer – the disease that removes the S from RTS and turns it into a battle of mass-production, a contest to see who can make more of the toughest units the quickest. *Battle Realms* eliminates it, by making production exponentially slower with every additional build, and effectively capping each army's maximum number of units. Brute force will rarely succeed on the easiest AI settings, and never on the hardest. Intelligence is key, and using terrain to your advantage or employing smart strategy brings victory.

The combat doesn't have the realistic Sun Tzu depths of *Shogun*, but then it was never meant to, since Sun Tzu rarely had to deal with zombies, magical archers and sumo rocket-launchers. This is not a realistic feudal Japan, but a creative one born from mythology and inspired by cartoon history. The characters are colourful, smartly designed, but crude: Liquid clearly wants *Battle Realms* to appeal to as many gamers as possible, with minimum system specs to suit, and thus the models look more like lead figurines than fighters. That's fine; the accentuated polygonal shapes could equally be attributed to a stylistic decision as a technical requirement, and the world fits the game comfortably.

It's not faultless. Unit control can be unwieldy, and the resource management is tiring and only a little more subtle than *C&C* and its myriad genetic photocopies. When *Battle Realms* is at its worst it feels like the whole core of the game is plodding and well-worn. But it's the accessible strategy that's new and compelling; the way the game, for all its flippantly mystical overtones, forces you to think about how you're directing every single unit. Castillo's succeeded in destroying his own legacy, a bold move that deserves recognition and praise.

Edge rating: **Seven** out of **ten**

Personal development

The first building a player can construct is the peasant hut, which produces the basic unit, the peasant, up to a player's maximum amount. Peasants can be turned into more powerful warriors by sending them to different training camps; the archery range produces Archers, while the bathhouse produces Geishas. Camps can also be used in combination: setting up a route that sends new peasants directly from the peasant hut to the alchemist hut and then into the dojo produces Kabuki Warriors ready for immediate conflict.

Dark Summit

Format: Xbox | Publisher: Radical Entertainment | Developer: THQ | Price: $50 (£38) | Release: Out now (US), March 14 (UK)

According to its promotional website, one of *Dark Summit*'s main selling points is that it's the first game of its kind: "The only action adventure snowboarding videogame with mission-based objectives" it proclaims. If this is a fair example of what the future of the subgenre might hold, then **Edge** can only hope is that there is no future. No-one deserves this, let alone the multiple half-arsed imitations that fast-buck merchants will inevitably spew forth.

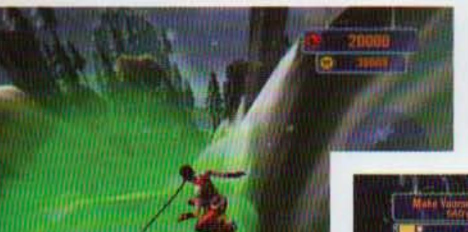
Taking the role of Naya McQueen, a boarder disenfranchised by new hillside rules, the player slides down a plastic mountainside looking for bombs so they can blow up the resort's ranger. Scattered around the hill are challenge gates. Completing the challenges gives points, and points can be exchanged for passes to higher sections of the mountain. There are 45 of them in all, and none are any subtler than the training missions you might find in an uninspired FPS. They feel like introductions to the control system. Press this button to jump. Perform a railslide. They feel like they're building to something. They are, in a sense.

While most of the challenges fall on their first attempt, the last mission you receive is a calculated attempt to extend the life of the game by ramping the difficulty up tenfold. All that does is show up the appalling control system for the mess it is, a system which has more parallels with *Horace Goes Skiing* than it does with *Amped* or *SSX*. Finish the game and you get five other riders to play with. But, other than some obligation caused by financial investment, why would you bother? The game's a slowride left/right memory test down a primitive pachinko-style mountainside, devalued further by corporate misrepresentations of youth, sentences dotted with awkward street slang and sponsored rebellion.

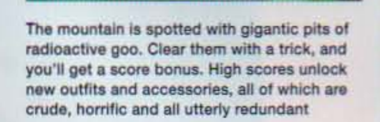
State it clearly, then: *Dark Summit* is awful. Not just awful in the sense that it's ill-conceived, or poorly executed, but awful in the sense that it barely exists as a game. It will sell, but only on the back of the success of *Amped* and *SSX* to powder addicts who like the idea of getting more from their slopes. It shouldn't, because it doesn't provide that. It doesn't provide anything short of disappointment and mental anguish, and those who buy it will be mortified.

Edge rating: Two out of ten





The mountain is spotted with gigantic pits of radioactive goo. Clear them with a trick, and you'll get a score bonus. High scores unlock new outfits and accessories, all of which are crude, horrific and all utterly redundant





Getting physical

While the physics systems of *SSX* and *Amped* make the player feel they're on snow, *Dark Summit*'s fudging constantly reminds them they're not. For a start, there's no spinning or flipping momentum, which makes the whole trick system look and feel ridiculous. Any momentum on the ground is false, too, to the extent that you'll sometimes find yourself picking up speed as you go uphill. Even the trails you leave are faked. Stand still for a moment, twist your board, and the parallel lines left behind you twist as well.









Most objects on the mountain can be destroyed or moved, with little point other mindless destruction. It's also frustrating when you deliberately run into objects that won't budge, aching for a little eye candy

MotoRacer 3

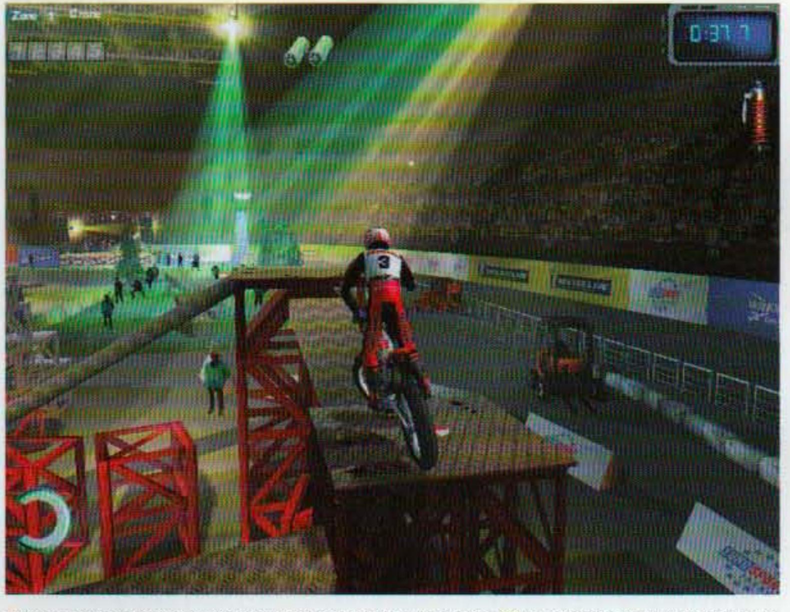
Format: **PC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **Delphine** Origin: **£35** Date: **Out now**

The authentic racing game is rapidly approaching the position of absolute atrophy of design that blights sports games and beat 'em ups, with each inching broken-legged hop pushing its boundaries imperceptibly to a layman's eyes. Which means that any break from the standard must receive respect.

Hence hail *MotoRacer 3*'s plethora of challenges. Speed, Supercross, Motocross, Trial, Stunt and Traffic modes offer strongly differentiated experiences, which vary from core, already strongly explored areas – Speed and Supercross – to more interesting esoterica. Trial updates *Kick-start* in three dimensions, while Stunt separates itself from similar aerial-gymnastic games by means of one of the most unusual control systems of all time. Tricks are performed by, unbelievably, pressing directions controls in conjunction with the number keys. It's an inelegant and unintuitive solution.

The banzai-run through Parisian traffic is the most limited of all sections. While its linearity is forgivable – not everything has to be *Midtown Madness* to enchant – the vehicular flow is entirely unconvincing. *MotoRacer*'s failings leaves too much for its undeniable qualities elsewhere to overcome.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



The trial courses demand perfectly judged manipulation of the bike. Taking place in a fully lit stadia, this is strongly characteristic of a game that's not afraid to enliven a situation with glitz





While the city-races through Paris disappoint, judging the individual bumps of the Motocross tracks provides a sizeable challenge

James Bond 007 In Agent Under Fire

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house** Origin: **£45** Date: **Out now**



Despite granting the illusion of freedom, players are firmly constrained throughout the course of *Agent Under Fire*. By performing tasks in a manner prescribed by the developer, players earn extra rewards





Driving missions and a reasonable multiplayer mode add some variation, but not really enough ingenuity to raise the standard of the game above average

Lately, producers of Bond movies have been more than happy to harness the external features of a successful formula, evoking a comfortable air of familiarity without capturing the spirit that made the early movies great. Which is a bit like *Agent Under Fire*. It certainly boasts the requisite plot – interminably convoluted and involving nefarious villains, funky gadgets, bombastic action set-pieces and lame one-liners. It also demonstrates a fair amount of imagination in its combination of standard firstperson action with one or two shoot 'em up sections and driving missions, as well as a reasonable multiplayer mode.

Unfortunately though, it is ultimately a formulaic affair, with player self-expression limited at every point by a firmly-on-rails structure which is more akin to an arcade lightgun title than the relative freedom of the more obvious comparison, *GoldenEye*. It's also fairly short, with very little replay value. No doubt the opportunity to play Bond will, once again, provide its own enjoyment to gamers of a certain persuasion. Most, particularly those who might be hoping for a title to match Rare's opus, will be disappointed by an unremittingly average experience.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

SSX Tricky

Format: **PlayStation2 (version tested), GameCube, Xbox** Publisher: **EA** Developer: **EA Canada** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**





The new Alaska track is icy and spartan, emphasising speed over graphical detail



Ubertricks involve the rider taking their feet off the board, and can only be achieved when the Tricky meter is full. Pull off six of them, and the meter remains permanently charged, providing infinite speed boosts

It's only been a year since *SSX* arrived, and the *Tricky* update presumably heralds an infinitely sequential policy. It's a shame, but it's predictable. Less predictably, *SSX* has aged quickly, perhaps in light of more visually striking titles like *MGS2* and *Devil May Cry*, or perhaps because of the competition from Xbox. Of course, it's a different game to *Amped*, with the emphasis on racing and a Day-Glo sheen, but it's still disappointing when you compare the textured backgrounds with *Amped*'s distant polygonal scenery.

But the impact is still there. You feel every spin, flip, and landing, all captioned with screams, shouts and fireworks. The addition of rivalries – some riders are friends, some are enemies, but all become more aggressive towards you each time you bang into them – is a pleasant gimmick, but a gimmick nonetheless. The alterations to the old courses are less throwaway, and the new ones should please those who've tired of the original's half-pipe pathways. It'll be too easy for masters of the original, and the Byzantine menu system and associated loading times annoy, but on-slope the game shines through, and it's still the best way to get snowbound adrenaline on PS2.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon

Format: **PC** Publisher: **UbiSoft** Developer: **Red Storm** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

The franchise appears to have been laid to rest, but to all intents and purposes *Ghost Recon* is a whole new *Rainbow Six*, polished and tweaked in almost every conceivable area. The game involves the familiar array of missions with you in charge of a squad of crack operatives, the AI's been given a good seeing-to, the graphics are to die for as long as your PC's up to the job, and it's still harder than titanium-coated nails.

Set in 2008, Tom Clancy's ultimate wet dream has come true and the evil Soviet empire has risen again so that Uncle Sam can give it another bloody good kicking. *Ghost Recon*'s missions take you through assorted theatres of war, from Russian outposts to the streets of Moscow, with a fine mix of objectives and playing styles. Commanding your troops is pleasingly straightforward – call up a command screen and tell them where to go and how to act with a minimum of mouse clicks – while survival at ground level isn't.

It's best described as a lightweight *Operation Flashpoint* with a weaker story but much better graphics. Alternatively, it's a friendlier *Rainbow Six* with knobs on. No bad thing, but *Flashpoint* is still king of this particular castle.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





***Ghost Recon* is another addition to the Clancy cadre of sniping, sneaking, stealth combat titles. Death is typically meted out at long distance**



Everything, down to each trooper's kit, is absurdly detailed, but directing your troops from the ground is a joy thanks to an intuitive command interface



The making of...

Dungeon Master

With tactile environments, a sophisticated spell system, great puzzles and a gallimaufry of creatures, *Dungeon Master* was one of the most influential games of its generation. Was magic in the air? For the Californian team behind the game, its inception was a truly remarkable one

Dungeon Master cast a powerful spell over those who entered its famous doors back in 1987. With its enchanting environments, colourful characters and sophisticated magic system it had the power to affect every waking moment. But for true fans, the cracked walls of Lord Chaos' domain became a way of life, ensuring that many an Atari ST disk drive rumbled long into the early hours. And while it is still possible to go back and free Tiggy, Wuuf, Daroou, Hawk *et al* from their entombment in the Hall of Champions, the magic of encountering this game within its cultural *milieu* is forever lost. The Californian team who lavished so much attention on one of videogaming's most cherished titles are similarly elegiac about the past.

"We were developing games during a magical transition time where games were evolving by leaps and bounds," states **Andy Jaros**, lead artist. "I like to compare it to late '60s rock. There was a great deal of undiscovered, untried styles to go around. The revolution of colour graphics, the mouse, even full sounds, had all come about quite recently and there were so many ways to employ these tools that we all had to innovate just to use them."



It was a small office in San Diego which saw the emergence of the multi-layered *Dungeon Master* concept. All friends, the FTL team would approach work in a leisurely manner by day and work like demons by night. "We used to have the refrigerator stocked with sodas and beer and frozen food," recalls **Dennis Walker**, assistant director. "We'd have the stereos cranked up and it was sometimes like a working party. It was a lot of fun because we were all being creative and we could tell we were on to something that was going to blow people away. All we started with was a way to draw a 3D dungeon, and that was it. There wasn't much backbone to it. The goal was to put some meat behind the pretty graphics, to create a functional world. We were creating a mode of reality in essence, and the reality was an evolutionary process."

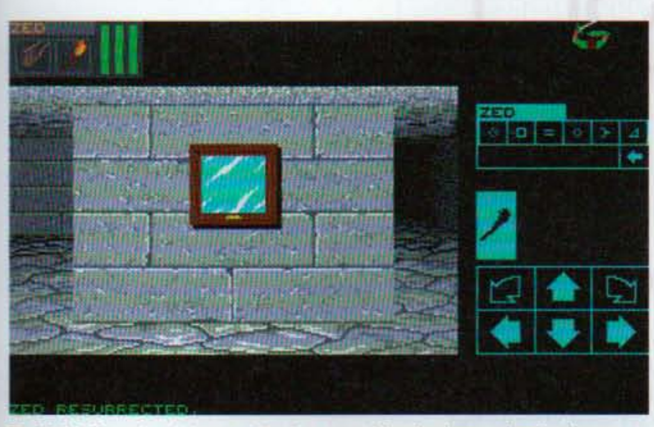
Certainly, *Dungeon Master* changed the way RPGs would be constructed for the next decade. An intuitive interface coupled with detailed environments brought a level of involvement rarely experienced within the genre before or since. The addition of fully 'tweakable' elements within the game world, including a bewildering array of objects which could be used by the four champions, gave the game its unique tactile quality. "Unlike the simple, mono-dimensional worlds of most games of the time, you had the sense that the *Dungeon Master* world was really 'alive'," points out **Michael Newton**, 2nd unit director. "You could throw something down the hall, descend the stairs, come back up, and find where it hit the wall and dropped. You could pull a lever in one spot and have that release monsters elsewhere in the dungeon, and in turn they would end up tripping devices."

Although point-and-click interfaces had been around videogames for a while, they had never been implemented with the rigour and refinement found in *Dungeon Master* – especially in a complex roleplaying title. Knobs on doors, items in niches, even the tiniest buttons hidden on walls could be manipulated to cause events or trigger fiendish traps. Decoration was important but almost every discernible object could be picked up, thrown, hacked to pieces or stored in the heroes' backpacks. It was an audacious achievement which puts many modern videogames, with their insistence on prerendered backgrounds and 'dummy' furniture, to shame. It was even possible to use the physics of the environment to your advantage. Certainly, no other game has quite managed to use doors to batter creatures with quite the same degree of brutality as *Dungeon Master*.

"We just didn't want to have a big empty dungeon," adds **Doug Bell**, the game's director. "The re-use of images wasn't that expensive. Most of the objects you saw took up four bytes of space each. It didn't matter what they were, you could just put them in your backpack. It was actually Wayne Holder who said, 'Why can't I just reach in and pick things up?' If there was one spark of innovation that made *Dungeon Master* the game it was, that was it. We were very conscious of making it as unobtrusive and intuitive as possible. Before, we had many specialised mechanisms – you had to go into a menu to get an overhead view, and then pick up the things around you. We



Format: **Atari ST**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **FTL**
Origin: **US**
Original release date: **1987**


The Hall of Champions is home to 24 mirrors containing the visages of ancient heroes. The player could study the stats before deciding which four (or fewer) to put in the party

thought, why can't I just pick it up from the view. We just kept simplifying it."

This was indicative of how the crew worked, bouncing ideas around until something inspired the whole team. There was no strict methodology or design. Walker even tested puzzles and early builds of the game in his cognitive psychology classes at the University of California, San Diego. "I was studying things like direct manipulation and user expectation. So something simple like the 'hand' in *Dungeon Master* went through several iterations. We started with the hand being one of the eight hands of the four players. You could choose whose character's hand your cursor represented. But this ended up too confusing in certain situations and we eventually settled on what we called the third hand, or the ninth hand, if you will."

The engine, environments and interface were supremely designed with the emphasis firmly on ease of use. But these elements would have been nothing without the wonderful creatures and champions which inhabited the game world. Many were designed by Jaros, but everyone on the team provided ideas. Although some were based on 'D&D' creatures the names were altered to avoid copyright infringement. The champion's names, too, were taken from strange and disparate sources. Daroou is Chewbacca's cousin, Halk is Conan's cousin and Azizi was the June 1975 Playboy playmate.

In the Hall of Champions hung 24 portraits of vanquished heroes, four of whom could be resurrected to help defeat Lord Chaos. As assistant to the Grey Lord it was the player's task to act as hands and eyes to the champions and guide them to victory. Choosing a good balance of characters was an important aspect of the game. A combination of wizardry, healing, fighting and speed were necessary to defeat the myriad foes in the dungeon. Developing powerful magic and potions could only be achieved if the 'mana' levels of characters was high enough. It was even possible to start your own potion cottage industry by combining spells with all the containers found throughout the dungeon.

Jaros developed the arcane *Dungeon Master* magic system from an old D&D campaign idea. It elevated the combat and puzzle solving beyond anything which had preceeded it. The player could select runes which in combination could trigger a diverse set of spells and effects. Though many spells were discovered on scrolls it was possible to experiment and discover effects as multifarious as seeing through walls or banishing ethereal creatures. It was a system which was both mysterious and incredibly logical once the runes were understood.

Spells, too, were required for solving the many conundrums placed throughout the dungeon's 14 levels. Bell recollects one puzzle which placed a powerful vorpal blade in a niche at the end of a long corridor. Suspicious holes marked the length of the passage on either side and grabbing the sword triggered a lethal gas attack which couldn't be avoided however quickly the heroes tried to run away. The solution? To stay put and drink healing potions until the gas eventually subsided. "I think we all enjoyed working on the puzzles," recalls Bell fondly. "Everyone who worked on the team had puzzles that they devised. You would go off and work on one and then try it out on everyone else. But we made sure the puzzles were never arbitrary. However difficult one was, when you solved it, it made sense to you. If it failed that test, then it didn't make the cut."



Dungeon Master aficionados also attest to the game's immense replayability. Playing through the game with fewer and fewer characters became an essential rite of passage for fans. Eventually, foolhardy adventurers would attempt the quest with just one of the heroes. It was an element of the game which Bell playtested vigorously himself. "My most fond memories were playing through with Hissssa. He had no mana to begin with, but he could get magic from a wand. And you had to painstakingly cast your spells for a while because you can only do one rune at a time. But by the time he reaches the end he is capable of really powerful spells. I'd always pick the weak characters because I just wanted to see if I could complete it. You had to be much more conservative in your



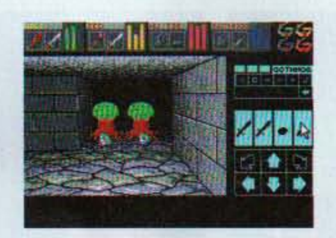
approach to the game, you couldn't just go hacking your way through."

The dramatic, if slightly Athena-inspired cover image was the last creative decision made by the team. "Wayne hired this guy called David Darrow to do the box art," recalls Walker. "He liked to work with live models, so he had his wife dress up as a sorceress and Andy dress up as the guy pulling the lever on the wall. We wanted to have the macho dude up front with the sword kind of stepping back in surprise as the door opened, so they hired a body builder from Gold's Gym. Unfortunately when we saw the painting it looked like he was falling into the pit – not the macho image we had imagined." Thankfully, the image did little to dent the reputation of one of finest RPGs ever devised. And *Dungeon Master* surely ranks as one of the titles most worthy of resurrection from videogame's own Hall of Champions.

"We'd have the stereos cranked up and it was sometimes like a working party. It was a lot of fun because we were all being creative and we could tell we were on to something that was going to blow people away"







The variety of creatures were taken from a number of sources: 'Dungeons & Dragons', horror flicks, and, of course, the incredibly fertile imaginations of the FTL team

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 42, February 1997

Richard, Richard, where did it all go wrong? At the start of '97 there you were, outside Origin's HQ with an Austin Texas T-shirt tucked into your jeans and a smile that said, "Mine! It's all mine!" The text said you were building a real-life castle. For yourself! And then EA consumed your company, and *Ultima IX* destroyed your reputation, and now? They say you're pimping Korean RPGs, but for all we know you're busking on a street corner somewhere in Britannia, praying for avatar salvation. Is one phonecall really too much to ask?

Elsewhere, Eidos were busy signing Ion Storm ("all set to become the next id"), a youthful Toshihiro Nagoshi detailed the joys of sound-sampling the Fuji Freeway for *Scud Race*, and Terry Pratchett described Teeny Weeny Games' *Discworld* sequel as "harder than the first game, but easier to solve". A prescreen focus on Capcom's *Street Fighter III* also proved memorable, if only for **Edge**'s photographer goading the game's producer into some camera shadow boxing. "Come on, son, give it loads... No, not like that... Try and look hard". Poor guy. Life's much easier when you can just do a quarter circle and punch.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"Arcade machine my ass!" Bizarre request or *Cruis'n USA* critique from Shiny's Dave Perry

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"With Matsushita claiming polygon manipulation abilities and a processing speed on a par with Sega's Model 3 arcade board, this could well be the format to watch in '97" **Edge** can't wait for the M2

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Mario Kart 64 (N64; 8/10), *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* (PS; 9/10), *J-League Perfect Striker* (N64; 9/10), *Soul Edge* (PS; 8/10), *Rage Racer* (PS; 8/10), *Diablo* (PC; 7/10), *Fighters Megamix* (Saturn; 8/10), *Cool Boarders* (PS; 6/10), *Reloaded* (PS; 5/10), *NBA In The Zone 2* (PS; 7/10)



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1. *Excalibur 2555 AD*, with "extravagant 3D engine" 2. *Mario Kart 64* scores a controversial 8/10 3. A youthful Nagoshi reflects on cover star *Scud Race* and the future of simian/sphere entertainment 4. Promoters of the Righteous 3D graphics card clearly know their audience 5. King of the castle, Richard Garriot 6. Namco's *Soul Edge*: "very appealing"

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Matt Wilkinson, managing director of BAM Studios, recalls a Rare epiphany





It's in 3D and everything... *KnightLore* left a lasting impression on Matt Wilkinson

I was still at school and hype over computer games didn't really exist back then. There were gaming magazines like 'Crash', and 'Sinclair User', but the whole ethos of the games industry was different. Games were geeky, and it wasn't good to be seen reading mags about them. Some kids did, and they either got a wide berth, or a good kicking.

A new Spectrum game was due to be released by a very well respected developer. Most of their games were eagerly awaited, but this one was different. "It's a 3D game," one lad gushed, "and you can walk around rooms and push blocks and stuff."

"Cobblers," replied a more sceptical scholar. "You can't do 3D on the Spectrum." And so it went on until finally, it was released. One lad became most people's best friend, by producing a copy of the game, as well as his Spectrum to play it on. That lunchtime changed my perception of games, and so-called 'hardware limitations'. An isometric 3D game on the humble Spectrum, which had a good frame-rate and was fun to play. "There's nothing that can't be done," I thought. The game was *KnightLore*, and the developer was Ultimate (Play The Game) – now known as Rare.

FAQ

Dene Carter

managing director, lead designer, Big Blue Box Studios

Big Blue Box is currently in the final stages of its long-awaited opus, *Project Ego* (working title). For more info, see the Prescreen Focus on page 50.

What was the first videogame you played?
On a ferry in about '81 I discovered *Defender*'s sinister pixellated world. I can't even remember where I was going – I just recall looking forward to the return journey so I could play it again.

What was the first computer or games machine you owned?
A ZX Spectrum. The wonders of the dead flesh keyboard. I had a dodgy old tape recorder that tried to electrocute me every few days.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
I was 12 and I mistakenly believed that programming worked by interpreting the English in comment lines. My first program was something like: "REM make spaceship move up when the 5 key is pressed."

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
I started my first company at 15 and wrote a game called *Rockman* in compiled basic. It took me about two weeks to write. With youthful naivety I convinced myself that if I could write 20 games in a year I'd be rich beyond my wildest dreams. That's the Thatcher years for you.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Nethack. Infinite variety, humour, the deepest gameplay you'll ever find and the only game to make me weep over the premature death of a lower-case 'd'. Closely followed by Game Boy *Zelda*, the only game I played on the bog.

What was the last game you played and what did you think of it?
Counterstrike, and I was shite. Simon began to yell 'Pull!' across the office when I respawned.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
Probably around 16. I am incredibly fortunate to have a wife who's not only understanding, but who positively encourages my obsession – although she usually refuses to hand over the controller when playing Japanese RPGs...

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
I keep looking for an old Williams game called *Hyperball*. I saw it once in Switzerland; a weird combination of a machine gun that fired two-centimetre diameter ballbearings at about ten balls per second and a pinball table. I also look for an old 2D scroller called *Arianne*. Probably says more about my feelings toward modern arcades than anything else.

What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
Favourite book? Probably 'The Way of Wyrd' by Brian Bates. Album wise, my perennial favourite has to be Dead Can Dance's 'Within the Realm of a Dying Sun'. Perfect stormy day music. Film wise, it has to be 'Alien'. Compelling mockumentary-style dialogue, each frame of the film a perfect screenshot and my introduction to Geiger. And I was such a nice boy before.

What game would you most like to have worked on?
From a level design point of view, probably *Ultima VII*. It's a well-conceived and incredibly believable fantasy world with incredible detail; an obsessive's dream.

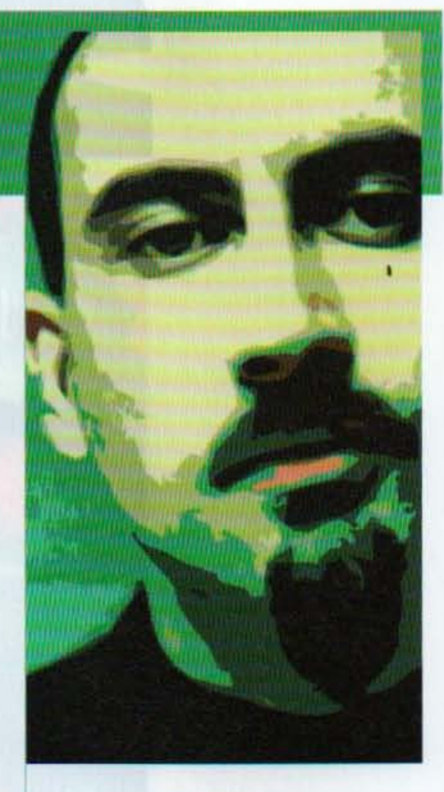
Of all the games you've been involved with, what's your favourite and why?
Probably *Dungeon Keeper*. Simon and I worked together for a long, long time and despite its legendary slippage I think we achieved some incredible things. It was the first game to show us the value of shoving our fingers in our ears and ignoring the negativity of others.

What stage is your current project at?
Too early to say (smiles).

What aspect will impress players the most?
Hopefully everything. We stopped pushing the proverbial envelope and are now attempting to push a proverbial corrugated cardboard box. I hope that some players load our game simply to live in our world for a short time.

"There are no ceilings, no restrictions – our only limits are our imaginations. Even the limits of technology are solved in time"

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
A new form of investment which allows independent companies to thrive. We need a system corresponding to indie-films funding or else we seriously risk stagnation.



What disappoints you about the industry?
The amount of suited individuals in prominent positions who haven't the first clue about games and still insist on making creative decisions for people. As I like to misquote, "Those who seek power are usually least suited to wield it."

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
The sheer, raw enthusiasm our work provokes – both in our teams and fans. I find the passion of videogame fans incredible in an industry that relies little on the cult of personality.

Whose work do you most admire?
The Gollop brothers – terribly underrated. Simon is five-and-a-half years younger than me, and managed to beat me at *Laser Squad* four out of five times when he was only 10. Humiliating.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
The Xbox – it's a fantastic piece of hardware. Once people start comparing the games available on all three consoles there's only going to be one sensible option.

Videogames: Art or Entertainment? (Discuss)
Art is a word used by pretentious arseholes who desperately desire invitations to parties populated by other pretentious arseholes. If you create a work of imagination, appreciated by others, then it's entertainment. I mean, do we really want to hear a Brian Sewell commentary on *Mario*?



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Edge believes the videogames industry needs more original games to get out of the current crisis. I believe you are missing the point and what we need is, put simply, better games.

Half-Life is not original, it simply took the old FPS concept and refined it. It didn't invent a whole new genre, it didn't introduce monkeys in a ball, it didn't revolutionise the way games are made, it simply made an astounding game perfectly executed. Same with *Metal Gear Solid*. These games don't need to feature brilliant new original concepts but just need to be executed better. These are the games that revitalise the industry because they don't alienate the massmarket and offer hardcore gamers a familiar but better experience.

Some original games are fun, but **Edge** should stop looking to them as the solution. They simply are not, as *Space Channel 5*, *Super Monkey Ball* and many others demonstrate, what gamers want. I want a good old FPS, but one with better execution. I want a boring old thirdperson action adventure, but one that features superb scripting as *Metal Gear Solid* does. I don't want a bizarre game for the sake of it.
Anonymous

Confusing gaming originality with graphical esotericism is a serious mistake. By that measure, you wouldn't even try playing *Super Monkey Ball* or *Ico* or *Pikmin*, because they offered something a little out of the ordinary. Would you then ignore *Half-Life* if the graphics featured cel-shaded jungle creatures instead of humans and aliens – even though the game dynamic is exactly the same? Or choose to play *Super Monkey Ball* if the visual style was dark and urban?

Kids these days make me laugh. They have no idea how lucky they are with the consoles around at the moment. I had a Speccy 48K and worked up through Sega, Nintendo and Amiga, right up to PS2 and N64. Speaking to a friend's nephew and listening to him whine about PS2 games I was amazed. I told him what things were like in years gone by when I was his age, the dark days when I had a Spectrum.

1) The game took four or five minutes to load and even then it only loaded 85% of the time. You just got on with it.
2) We never had save points. You had to sit there and finish it. No coming back after dinner to finish it, you never ate – most games didn't even have a pause button.
3) On most games one button did everything, we never had different buttons for different things.
4) We had attribute crash, and on the Speccy, bullets and missiles often disappeared into the background only to reappear next to your craft.
5) We had lives. One hit, one life. We never had energy bars; you got hit you died. Simple.
6) Multiload. On some games you had to load the next level. Even then it never always worked.
7) Collision detection was terrible, things would miss and still kill you.
8) Games were hard then, these days I complete most games (how can you not with saves continues and energy bars?). In those days I completed about 5% of my games.
9) I admit I'm a bitter and jealous man. Its not fair, I would have killed for a PlayStation when I was young.
10) Still, these days you don't have £1.99 games any more.

Eddie Daly

Thrust and *Zolyx* on C64 for £1.99 apiece. Ah, the good old days... Mind you, multiload is back with a vengeance.

For somebody that claims to be 'a writer', perhaps Rene Kneyber (**E**104) should spend more time working on his prose before stepping down from his heady literary pedestal to criticise the opening sequences of what is effectively a two-year-old computer game.

It frustrates me when people who work in other areas of the entertainment industry decide to unload unfairly on videogames. Storytelling is certainly one of the areas with room for drastic improvement, but remember that videogames are still in their infancy compared with art, literature and even relatively new media such as TV and cinema, and there have been some notably engrossing game storylines in recent history, not to mention the countless great games with no storyline at all.

Although it is becoming less acceptable, to a certain extent games can get away with clichéd storylines providing the gameplay is up to scratch. You should be playing games primarily for their interactivity, so if all you really want is a great storyline then stick to reading books or rent a DVD for the evening. Furthermore, switching off a videogame because you don't like its intro sequence is, quite frankly, ridiculous. How would you feel if somebody put down a book you spent 18 months writing after reading just the first page? If you are going to criticise *Code: Veronica*, it should be for its iffy control system and repetitive gameplay, not to mention the hit and miss nature of some of the primary game features, and some glaring oversights in its continuity. These are the important points; the storyline merely serves to stitch the gameplay sequences together.
Ed Bartlett, lead game designer,
The Bitmap Brothers

How could I have not spotted it in the first place? PCs have patches – the 'bane' of home computing that often requires long downloads; consoles have half-arsed sequels – the latest answer to meeting deadlines.

Let me explain, *SSX Tricky*, *Gran Turismo Concept 2001 Tokyo* – both pathetic add-ons designed to add a new course or two, or in the case of *GT*, some new cars only available in a self-contained arcade mode option. Sure, both of these examples are standalone programs that will run without the original software, yet who will want to shell out again for the same game experience. *FIFA*, *Madden*, along with most other EA franchises, exist only because of the selling and

"You should be playing games primarily for their interactivity, so if all you want is a great storyline then stick to reading books or rent a DVD for the evening"



A reader argues reworking existing ideas, rather than an injection of original games, is the solution to the current crisis affecting the videogame world

purchasing of real-life players in real-life sports, not because of greater gameplay.

It works though, and that's what's depressing about this situation. Developers will always find a way of releasing their game as close to the deadline as possible, meaning omissions – patches are free, and if I can improve my game for that price then let's have it. I do not want to pay for any game twice over.

Looking to the future and many people assume that the Xbox will become the platform for patches and instability because of its hard disk, yet with the singular structure of the Xbox instability will not be an issue as the developers are able to test all one of the possibilities for the hardware set-up.
Rob Payne

The real crux of the matter is the release and sale of products that aren't actually finished. And there's a world of difference between an unsightly bug that rears its ugly head after QA, and a game that's rushed out for Christmas and which fails to work properly past level three. Also, this 'patch' mentality assumes everyone is – or wants to be – online. The addition of a hard drive in a console shouldn't be seen as a safety net for developers who can't handle deadlines.

I've just read this month's **Edge** (**E**104) and the feature on the Game Boy Advance was most interesting. I bought my GBA from www.lik-sang.com, a Hong Kong exporter, along with a flash cartridge and linker as you can use these for coding on the GBA. I'd like to raise two points.

Point one is regarding the *Advance Wars* game being delayed. I bought a version from the US and it plays fine on my Hong Kong GBA and on a UK GBA. How can it be taking so long? (By the way, the game is fantastic.)

The other point is regarding your ten most wanted titles for the GBA. I've actually almost completed a GBA port of *Elite*, only got to sort out sound and a decent control method. I tried emailing Ian Bell seeing if I could release it onto his Web page with all the other versions but got no reply. I then tried emailing David Braben and got no reply although I did get a reply from someone who works at Frontier Developments and looks after the *Elite* club. Basically I'm not allowed to release it because it would be illegal. I tried asking why, seeing as every other version is available (including ones which were never published) and was told that they are illegal and Braben reserves the right to sue, and has chosen not to do so. Bugger.
Scott Newby

Nintendo took the decision to delay *Advance Wars* after events on September 11. Ironically, the game was already on sale in the US by the time this action took place, so it feels like an overreaction to us.

Here's hoping that Braben or Bell see sense and cut you a deal to release *Elite* on GBA. There are a few potential players here already...

Piracy is an emotional subject for computer gamers, yet something rarely mentioned is secondhand games. Surely the buying and selling of secondhand games is just as damaging to the computer games industry as the plague of piracy? Yet computer exchange shops thrive in every city, offering AAA titles for £20 just weeks after release.

Every sale of a secondhand game must be a loss of revenue for the publisher? The only parties that benefit are the computer exchange store and the punter, surely there cannot be any benefit to the computer games industry from such sales?

Yet there is a flipside. Take the example of older games like *System Shock 2* for the PC. I spent weeks searching games stores in vain, and even Electronic Arts couldn't supply a new copy. I finally found a secondhand copy for £10 in one of London's many computer exchange stores. Without the secondhand market, I would never have enjoyed this excellent title.

And what about people on low incomes who cannot fork out £30 or £40 for a new title, but can find a secondhand copy at half that price a few months later? What are **Edge**'s thoughts on the secondhand games market?
Rob Cole

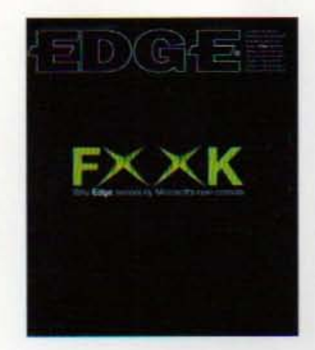
The difference between piracy and 'pre-owned' games (the currently used Americanism for secondhand titles) is that anyone who pirates games wants to enjoy the efforts of others but isn't prepared to pay for the privilege. Also, pirates like brand new, cutting edge titles, while the adroit bargain hunter has to be content with games that are weeks, and often months old – which is too high a price for most gamers.

I, like many other serious gamers, have found myself criticising the 'massmarket' and its effect on games with PS2 in particular seeming to suffer my wrath. However, if you apply the 'videogames as art' argument that gets bandied around then things aren't that bad. In the world of the movies the massmarket rush to watch the latest dumb Hollywood movie giving it huge opening grosses. I myself would rather be watching the latest Coen brothers gem. On TV the soaps get the biggest figures but I'd rather see 'The West Wing' thanks. In books J. K. Rowling is well on the way to being a billionaire but really I'll stick with Iain Banks. So should we be worried that *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* was the number one game last Christmas?

No – as long as the income these cash cows generate allow for the next *Deus Ex* to be created. More importantly every now and then a Harry Potter fan may say to themselves – "I think I'll give that 'Lord of the Rings' a read." The trick for the games industry is to make sure there is a 'Lord of the Rings' to read, not just 'Harry Potter Volumes 1–20'.
Chris Silk

Anyone that's read the Harry Potter novels will probably disagree with your appraisal, but your underlying point is valid.

"Come on Nintendo. Get the thing released here. Get the PAL conversions right. Bombard the airwaves with adverts. Then you might just have a chance"



Matthew Pring wasn't impressed with E105's cover treatment which he feels has irreversibly traumatised the Game Boy-playing generation

Cover, issue 105: pathetic.

So RedEye freely admits his swearing is neither big nor clever within the pages of issue 105, but the usual disclaimer warns us that **Edge** may have a differing view. Like we didn't notice!

This puerile attempt at attention-grabbing on the front of a publication which shares shelf-space in WHSmith with Game Boy magazines aimed squarely at children is inexcusable. Have your usual sensibilities to tasteful modern design been discarded? Are we now to expect this trend to continue inside **Edge** with reviews for "pant-wettingly brill" games that all get nine out of ten? All you are doing is reinforcing stereotypes that you say you are trying to break away from.

Matthew Pring

Yes, the cover was attention-grabbing – we wanted to draw attention to the fact that we were featuring the first reviews of Xbox games, and, judging by your letter, it worked. But in WHSmith this month, no more than an arm's length away from **Edge** 106, was an issue of movie mag Hotdog with the coverline 'Bad Mother Fuckers' (the 'u' was partially obscured), not to mention a host of men's lifestyle magazines featuring scantily clad women. Welcome to the 21st Century.

That is it. As Popeye said, "Enough is enough, and I can't stands no more". What the hell are Nintendo playing at? David Gosen should be a politician, they way he wriggles out of the question marks hanging over Nintendo's European strategy. If the GameCube isn't released here until September, it will lose the next-gen war. "But we don't want to compete against Sony." Oh, really? Then what would he say if I told him that I am seriously considering buying a PS2 instead of a GameCube, and maybe an Xbox to boot?

It comes down to more than format bias. I have a genuine desire to see Nintendo do well, because they make my favourite games, my favourite consoles, my favourite controllers. If Sony and Microsoft clean up, that jeopardises their revenue, which jeopardises future games by Nintendo.

Come on Nintendo. Get the thing released here. Get the PAL conversions right. Bombard the airwaves with adverts. Don't waste money sponsoring football teams. Then you might just have a chance. Maybe I'm oversimplifying. What does **Edge** think?

Tony Ounsworth

The simple truth appears to be that Nintendo can succeed without the European territories, and any money made over here is a kind of bonus – albeit a potentially huge one. The problems of Europe are clear (different TV systems, different languages, different marketing and distribution systems), but Sony and Microsoft seem to cope quite admirably, so quite why Nintendo appears to struggle so much is anyone's guess.

If Nintendo is to succeed in Europe – and not just financially, but in capturing the hearts and minds of a new generation of gamers – it has to take its head out of its arse and provide the same kind of service that's enjoyed by the gamers in the far east and west. Our appraisal of the GameCube is horribly tarnished by the fact that we still have no idea when it's due to appear over here, in what numbers and with what software. We're loathe to admit it, but **Edge**'s advice is to import your GameCube from the US so you can enjoy the latest releases today, full-screen and full-speed.

I recently attended the Xbox roadshow in Manchester, where hardcore gamers willing to travel to the rain capital of the UK could, for ten minutes, get their hands on eight playable Xbox titles. Also provided was a range of 'related' free marketing merchandise such as an Xbox hat that would not have looked out of place on Eddie the Eagle, a Mint Aero chocolate bar and an unknown energy drink in a green can.

First up, *Jet Set Radio Future*. Competent game but visually and technically no improvement over the original DC version I have been playing for over a year. Never mind, next up...

Dead Or Alive 3. Nice graphics and solid enough but then so was *DOA2* on Dreamcast. Still not getting that 'green' Xbox feeling. Open Mint Aero and move onto next title.

Amped. Its a snowboarder game. Like Westlife, you either love them or want them to disappear. I am in the latter category so lets move onto what I regarded as the *Mario 64* of the show, the much-vaunted *Halo*.

Oh dear. A strange sinking feeling was starting to happen in my stomach, and I wasn't sure if it was the mixture of Mint Aero and green high-energy drink, or the realisation that I may be witnessing something very familiar. It feels like Dreamcast all over again.

Microsoft appear, admittedly only on a brief first impression, to have produced a console by numbers, carefully ticking off pre-requisite criteria on an Excel spreadsheet as it was developed. One beat 'em up (tick), one car game (tick), one cartoon platformer (tick) and so on. The generic mediocrity of what was on display was depressing and to make it worse, there was no evidence that despite the extra grunt hidden inside the suitcase of a console, there was no evidence on display to make the PS2's graphics chips tremble. Quite the contrary.

For Xbox to succeed they needed not eight average titles but two or three 'must have' games with ample 'wow' factor. When put alongside titles like *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Devil May Cry* and *Jak And Daxter* the Xbox looked very... well, Dreamcast.

Perhaps most telling of all was the Xbox girl standing in front of a non-existent 'Pre-Order your Xbox NOW!' queue, looking despondently at the kids leaving the demo and nicking a second Mint Aero bar on their way out.

I left the event feeling slightly deflated, but very alert and with a new found craving for Mint Aeros.

Jay Smith

"This puerile at attention-grabbing on the front of a publication that shares shelf-space in WHSmith with Game Boy magazines aimed squarely at children is inexcusable"





Rather than due to withdrawal symptoms, the strange sinking feeling in Jay Smith's stomach resulted from playing *Halo* at an Xbox Xperience

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Topic: **The importance of game setting...**
Poster: **Tito Juentez**
Would *Shenmue* be as appealing to UK gamers if it was set in London? I wouldn't find it such an attractive proposition. The game environment is largely believable, and as such it isn't completely alien but it isn't familiar to the point that I'm not interested in the cultural differences. When you're in a completely alien setting there aren't enough reference points to give you an understanding of what is happening. For example in *Shenmue* there are bars and restaurants, we recognise the subtle differences, but in a completely alien environment we wouldn't have the experience to tell one room from another. The alien environment isn't as rich, because we have no preconceptions of what things should be.

Poster: **Ersby**
On a related note, I saw a documentary on 'Star Trek' where the props designer was talking about how they spent ages making high tech salt and pepper pots, and then decided to just make them look like ordinary pepper pots, otherwise no one would know what they were. I'm not sure how this relates to game design. But it's still early. Hopefully I'll think of something better later on.

Poster: **Tito Juentez**
That's exactly what I mean though. Where's the fun in wandering around a place where you have no idea what anything is? They stop being the props of a game and you begin to see them as the polygons that they are.

Topic: **Finite Creatures**
Poster: **Souljacker**
Playing *Street Fighter* on GBA, I found myself thinking about games on consoles that I wouldn't finish, possibly not even play again. Here was a game in my hand that I played ten years ago – survival of the fittest? The best board/card games are timeless – that's a given, in my opinion.

I think there have been few classics in gaming; time generally separates the good from the bad. *Tetris*, *Pac-Man* maybe, *Street Fighter II*? Not sure. But I find it to be of more substance than the last product from Squaresoft or Konami. Could these games be going in the wrong direction and not know? Perhaps one day out of the mainstream as we know it, electronic gaming will find a direction of its own. I wonder what will be remembered in 50 years' time for influence and what will just be played more than chess.

Poster: **Ugly Bunny**
Chances are that chess will always remain a much loved game – after all, for the length of time it's been around, and the amount of competitors and mimics it's seen off in its own field, it will take a serious change in human thought before it's usurped. A good question might be what games will be played in 2000 years that are around now?

Probably *Tetris*. Unlike other games, it seems to survive the tests of time rather well, it's always fun. Whereas the first Mario and Link games are being dragged under as the system they were made for dies, the continual porting of *Tetris* means that it simply hops from system to system and never gets lost in time.

In a strange way, unless the industry builds some sort of library, most games will be lost once the system they where made for becomes redundant. It's either that or continually porting the same game to the latest system and hoping the gameplay holds. Back to the original question: games will never develop in the wrong way due to simple supply and demand.

Game evolution may look a bit like the course of a river, meandering, but inevitably individuals will steer it into the right direction every time it looks like getting lost.

Topic: **Cameras: Immersion vs. Practicality**
Poster: **Ish**
A comment in this month's *Pikmin* review set me thinking about cameras in 3D games from (what I consider) to be an interesting perspective. The comment in **Edge** about *Pikmin* concerns the fact that the camera is 'stuck' to your astronaut. In both top down and over the shoulder views the camera is always tied to him. Presumably it's designed in this way to increase your involvement in the game. You are the astronaut. True, you're disembodied, but your abilities and view of the landscape is tied to the his location. Would the game lose anything by allowing you to break this connection and roam the map freely? Possibly.

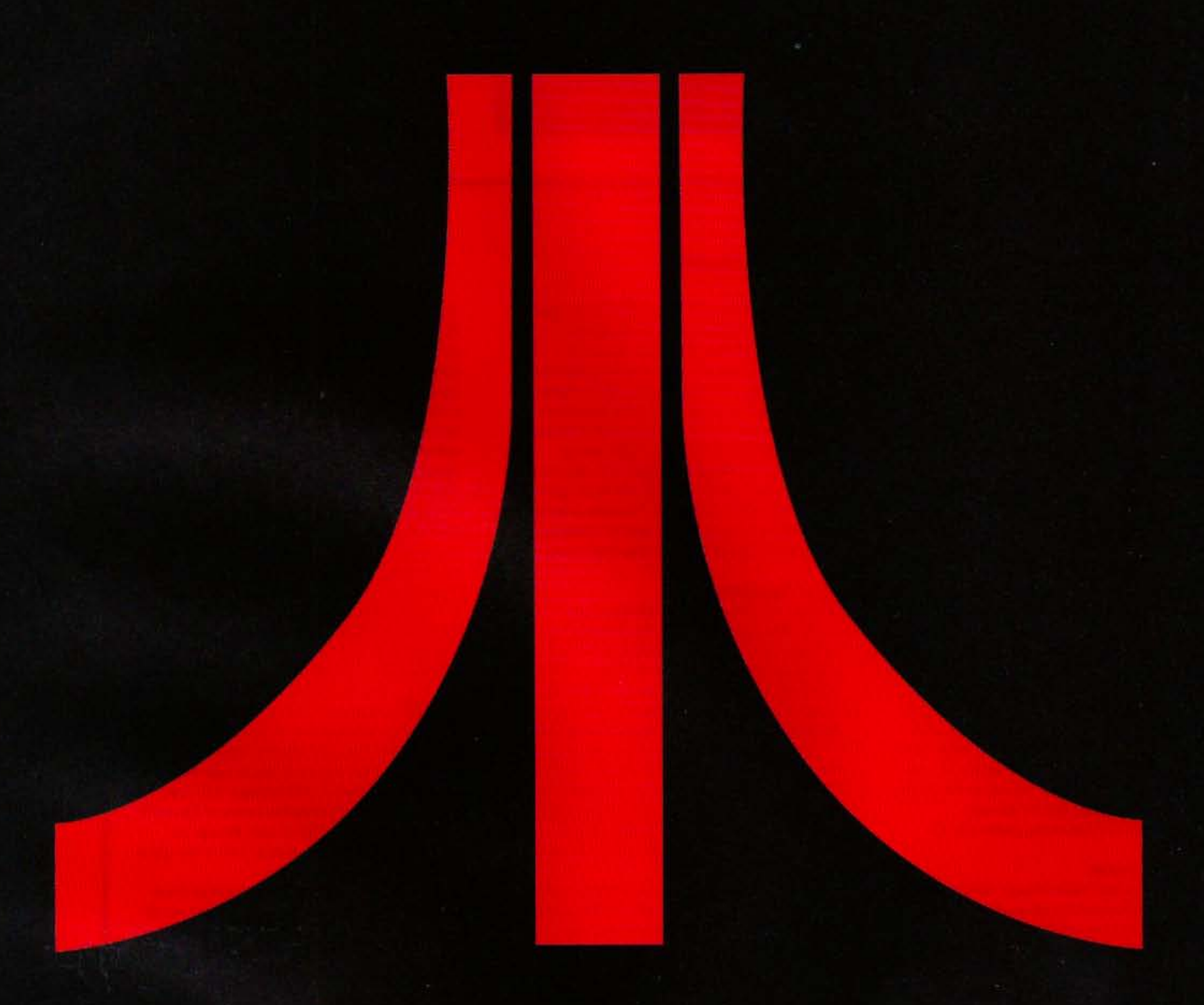
Silent Hill 2 is an extreme example of an immersive camera. It relies on disturbing camera angles to help build the tension that is the core underpinning of the whole game. It works – you do get involved and I've often found myself on the edge of my seat cautiously exploring locations. However the downside of this is that combat can become very awkward. Many times I've entered a room in the apartment buildings to hear the shuffling of a monster getting closer but I can't see it without running into the centre of the room (not exactly a sound tactic!) even though the monster turns out to be dead in front of my game character's eyes.

But make the camera more 'practical' (over the shoulder or firstperson) and the game would become a very sterile lifeless experience. An affliction levelled at many firstperson shooters – such as *No One Lives Forever* and *Red Faction*. *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark* overcome this to some extent (and succeed) by showing your character at the start of each level and then moving the camera into the firstperson perspective. I'm not sure where I'm going with this – I guess I'm just trying to start a discussion on a topic that interests me.

Edge is looking for talented feature writers. If you have excellent writing skills, an in-depth knowledge and passion for gaming and an abundance of ideas then you could well be the right person. Strong industry contacts would be a bonus but enthusiasm, reliability and vision are more essential qualities. Applicants should send samples of work and five comprehensive feature ideas, along with a full CV and covering letter, to:
Mark Walbank, Edge, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW.

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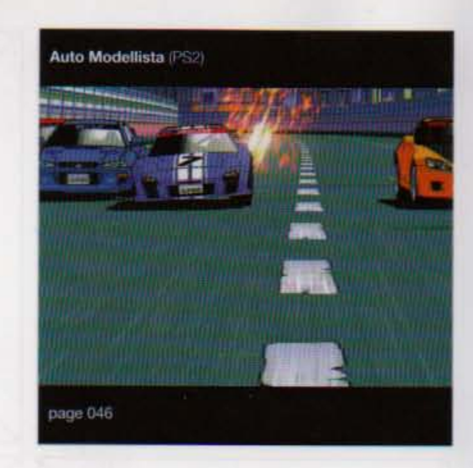
Next month



A legend returns

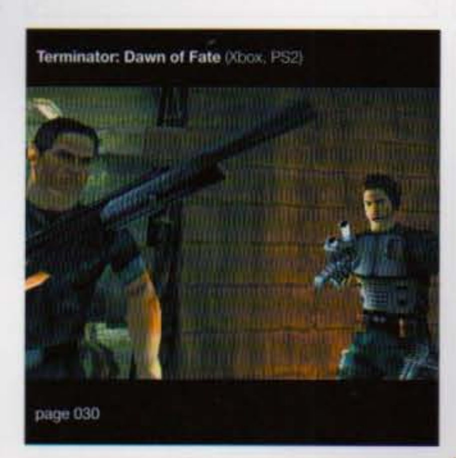


Auto Modellista (PS2)



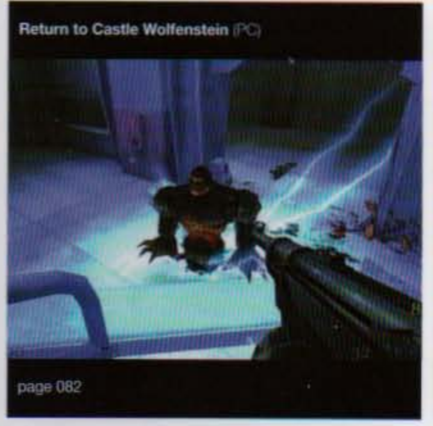
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Return to Castle Wolfenstein (PC)



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Spider-Man (PS2, GC, Xbox, PC)



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